



The Christian's Spiritual Workout

Phil. 2:12-30

[HAND OUT SPIRITUAL GROWTH COVENANT CARDS]

People who want to be like Paul and say “for me to live is Christ” and who want to move toward the “goal” that God placed in their lives - it’s people like that that take these Spiritual Growth Commitment seriously.

1. Worship God Regularly

2. Daily Prayer and Bible Reading

3. Be Active in A Small Group.....

- Sunday School class (more than enrollment and showing up once in a while, growth and nurture group)
- Some other ongoing small group

4. Give Generously to God

- your commitment to tithe is part of your spiritual growth,
- Believe me - it’s not about keeping the church afloat - it’s about determining what/who you’re serving. Jesus (Matt. 6:24) said you *“cannot serve both God and Money.”*
- Remember what I said several weeks ago that Paul shows us that the true goal in life is to enjoy and display the glory of God? We said that, *Money is given to you so you can use it in such a way that you show that money is not your treasure. Christ is.*

5. Serve in at least one Ministry

- The reason some of you seem to be stuck spiritually is because if

God gave you more of himself, you wouldn’t know what to do with it....

CHALLENGE - SIGN IT...

I. PHIL. 2:12-13 - PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

I do not know who it was who first thought that being spiritual means withdrawing from the world, but the idea certainly entered the Christian church at an early period and has had negative effects ever since.

- Perhaps it was started by the Egyptian hermit, **Anthony**, sometimes called the "Father of Monasticism". He lived most of his life in the desert. And there were others like them.
- Maybe by a Syrian monk named **Simon Stylites**. He sat on top of a pillar fifty feet high to avoid contact with the world. (37 years!)

These men were thought to be spiritual primarily because of their withdrawal. The Bible does not support this view of spirituality.

No Christian must ever say that spending time alone with God is unnecessary, especially time spent in prayer. Yet the Bible never allows us to think that meditation has achieved its purpose for us unless it results in practical application. Truth leads to action, and there is no value to a mountaintop experience unless it helps us to live in the valleys.

Last week in our study of Philippians 2:5-11 we looked at some of the most amazing truths in the New Testament -- the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, his sacrificial death, and the certainty of his eventual reign over all creation.

Yet these doctrines are introduced into the letter, not for their own sake but for very practical purposes. They were included as an example of the role of obedience and humility in living the Christian life - how it builds unity. And no sooner have they been set forth in these seven verses than Paul returns once more to “practical Christianity.” He 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”* (vv. 12-13).

Have you ever noticed that Paul uses the word “*therefore*” twice in these verses—once in [verse 9](#) and once in [verse 12](#)? “Therefore” means “because of this,” and the use of the word points to two parallel results of Christ’s conduct.

- Jesus Christ humbled himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross; *therefore God also exalted him* (v. 9).
- Jesus Christ humbled himself and became obedient to death; *therefore* the Christian is to *obey* and *work out his or her salvation* (v. 12). The words show that doctrine always leads to practical Christianity.

Working It Out

Today we’re going to consider what it means to “workout” spiritually.

[Philippians 2:12](#) is a problem for Christians who neglect the context and assume that the verse supports the idea of a “self-help” salvation. People who see salvation in these terms take this verse as a statement that salvation can be earned and we are to work toward it. But the verse does not teach that. On the contrary, it teaches that because you are already saved, because God has already entered your life in the person of the Holy Spirit, because you, therefore, have his power at work within you—because of these things you are now to strive to express this salvation in your conduct.

This is evident for several reasons. Most importantly, it is the clear meaning of the sentence itself. The verse does not say, “work for your salvation” or “work toward your salvation” or “work at your salvation.” It says “*work out your salvation.*” And you can’t work *out* what God hasn’t already worked it *in*!

“The Day After”

Think of it this way. When a person believes in Jesus Christ and is saved, he/she is not much different from what they were in the moments before they believed.

Before she believed she was filled with misconceptions about God and herself. She had problems that she could not solve. She was doing many things that were against the will of God.

At the moment she believes, these things are exactly the same. She still has the same problems, the same misconceptions, the same sins, sometimes even the same doubts.

But it now begins to dawn on her that many of these things must change. She now has the Holy Spirit within her heart, and as she responds to the work of the Holy Spirit, she begins to see that the salvation *she already has* must express itself in action. It must be seen distinctly in her conduct.

So, if you are a Christian; if you have known God’s deliverance in your life -- then you have entered upon a lifetime of God’s training and encouragement and are to seek to express the character of God in all that you do. You are to work out this salvation in your conduct.

It’s God’s Working

I have said that we are to work out the salvation that God has worked in, but to see the whole picture one more thought must be added: Even as we work out our salvation we are to know that it is actually God’s Holy Spirit in us who does the working. Paul writes, “*Therefore ...work out your salvation with fear and trembling*” (v. 12). But no sooner has he said this than he immediately adds [v.13](#), “*for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose*”. It is actually God who does the working.

You say, we’ll now I’m confused????

God’s working begins with our wills, for the verse says that God works in us first *to will and then to act out his good purpose*. Willing always comes before doing.

We will never understand the doctrine of God’s working to affect a person’s will until we realize that apart from the work of God in a person’s heart through Jesus Christ a person does not have free will where spiritual realities are concerned.

I know that someone will want to reply, “What! Do you mean to tell me that I do not have free will? That I cannot do anything I want to?” My answer is, “Yes, you cannot.”

Listen carefully. You have free will to decide certain things, but you do not have free will to decide all things.

- You can decide whether you will go to work on Monday morning or pretend you are sick.
- You can order turkey over roast beef at a restaurant.

But you cannot exercise your free will in anything that involves your physical, intellectual, or spiritual capabilities.

- By your own free will you cannot decide that you are going to have a 50 percent higher I.Q. than you do, or that you will have a gift for dealing with quantum mechanics.
- You do not have free will to run the 100-yard dash in eight seconds.
- You do not have free will in anything intellectual or physical.

More significantly, just as you do not have free will intellectually or physically, so you do not have free will spiritually. *You cannot choose God.*

Adam had free will, but he lost it. And all people since are without it until it is recreated in them by the Holy Spirit.

Let me give you an illustration. It is as if a person were standing on the edge of a steep, muddy pit with slippery sides. As long as he is on the edge he has free will; he can either stay on the bank, leave or jump in.

But if he decides to jump in, then his free will is lost as far as getting out of the pit is concerned. He has free will to walk around on the bottom or to sit down. He has free will to try to scramble up the side or to accept his plight philosophically. He has free will to cry for help or to be silent, to be angry or complacent. But he does not have free will to be again up on the edge of the embankment.

This is what happened in Adam and Eve. They were created on the edge of the pit. God said, Gen. 2:16–17, “*You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.*” This was a test case, and Adam and Eve had free will to obey or to disobey the commandment. When they disobeyed it they fell away from God (into the pit). They lost the free will to choose God, and they proved it by running away from God when God came to see them in the garden.

Since Adam and Eve, all people are born with the same inability to choose him. Some are complacent; some are angry. Some are silent and philosophical. Some are resigned; some are anxious. *But all are unable to come to God.*

No one comes to God until God reaches down by grace into the mud pit of human sin and impotence and lifts him up and places him again on the banks and says, “This is the way; walk in it.”

This is what God does in salvation. The Bible says, “*There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God*” (Rom. 3:10–11). The Bible says we are born again “*not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God*” (John 1:13). Jesus said, “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*” (John 6:44).

We must face this truth.

Even if every generation of mankind and every city and village on earth had a John the Baptist to point to Jesus Christ and to call us to him, apart from the supernatural work of God in human hearts, no one would come.

If God rearranged the stars of heaven to spell out, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved,*” no one would believe.

If God sent his angels with the sound of a celestial trumpet to call us to repentance, no one would repent.

If you have come to God, it is only because God has first entered your life by his Holy Spirit to enliven your will, to open your eyes to his truth, and to draw you [irresistibly] to himself.

It is only after this that you are able to choose the path that he sets before you.

Two Kinds of Works

If you have seen this truth, you are ready to see that the same God who works in you *to will* also works through that will *to do according to his good purpose*.

I would like us all to turn to Eph. 2:8-10, because these verses are really Paul’s own commentary upon Philippians 2:12-13,

I wonder if you have ever noticed that the well-known verses of Ephesians 2:8-10 speak twice of our works, the things that we do. One kind of work is condemned because it comes out of ourselves and is contaminated by sin. The other kind of work is encouraged because it comes from God as he works within the Christian. The verses say, “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works* [that is, of human working], *so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good*

works [that is, the result of God's working], *which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" These are Paul's own commentary, for they tell us that although God can never be satisfied with any good that comes out of human beings, he is satisfied and pleased with the good that is done by Christians through the power of Jesus Christ within them. Through that power the tyranny of sin is broken, the possibility of choosing for God is restored, and a new life of communion with God and holiness is obtained.

Have you had that experience? Have you felt the power of God within enabling you to do what God desires? Charles Wesley knew God's power. He wrote:

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

The power of Christ within is a wonderful reality for Christians. And although it is not easy, now we have all things and are enabled to work out our salvation.

II. PHILIPPIANS 2:14–16

We are to live for Jesus Christ in the midst of a wicked and ungodly generation. In *Philippians 2:14–16*, Paul writes, *"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing."*

This was Paul's great desire for the saints at Philippi, and it is God's desire for us -- not to retreat from the world, but we are to live for God in the world. We are to make our lives count! We are to get in the game.

For too many believers, the game is just the classroom of the church. But most things are not learned solely in the classroom, they must be learned in life.

Just this week I visited a young man who has his first engineering job out of school. He told me the very same thing. He learned a lot of stuff in school. But it was only when the company put him "in the field" that what he learned on paper got real.

It's true in most things. When I was younger I wanted to learn photography. I bought some books and subscribe to

magazines. I learned about shutter speeds and f-stops. I learned about film speeds and read about lighting techniques. But I really didn't learn about photography until I started to test those things out with a camera.

I started to advertise my new skills and picked up some wedding photography jobs. Things went pretty well and people were happy. Until one wedding I was taking photographs in the church as the couple came down the aisle. Only to find out later that knowing all about film speeds and lighting ratios doesn't do much good, *unless you also put film IN the camera!*

In the same way, some people think they have learned the Christian life from a book while sitting on the sidelines. But the real Christian life is learned in the practice of it. No, we are not to be of this world, but we are to be in this world.

That's why you need to get out of your shell and out of your comfort zone and find places of service for God. God is not concerned about your mistakes. But you'll be hard pressed to explain to God why, when he gave you life, and talents, and salvation and so many other things - why you never found ways to use all those things for Him?

You know, vs. 15 tells us that serving Christ may not be easy in the world, but it also tells you that living for Jesus will be noticed.

By a large margin the U.S. public believes that ethics and standards of honesty are getting worse. This is a view held by all age groups and in each socio-economic level.

The public also does not give very high marks to people in most of the 24 occupations tested in a Gallup Poll in terms of honesty and ethical standards. **Here is the full list, with the percentages who say the honesty and ethical standards are very high or high:**

[SEE CHART - next page]

Given such a low opinion of the integrity of so many occupations, believers today have an **outstanding opportunity** to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

III. PHILIPPIANS 2:17-30 -THREE EXAMPLES

By review I want to briefly present this section of scripture to you.

The previous verses have shown that the central theme of *Philippians 2* is the Christian life. In the opening verses of chapter 2, Paul wrote that the *Philippians* were to let nothing be done *out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility each was to consider other Christians better than themselves.* They were to be humble and obedient to God.

Paul then said that Jesus Christ showed the way, in his path from the throne of heaven to the cross, and the Christian is to copy him in that.

At this point someone is bound to object. “That might be all right in theory, but it is pretty hard to do in practice. How can a Christian meet such standards? I can’t do it. I guess I’ll just have to be content to live as I am.”

Paul replies that although it is hard, it is not impossible. God is working in us to help us “work out our salvation.”

To prove that it is possible, not only in theory, but also in practice, **Paul now presents three human examples:** Paul himself, an apostle (vv. 17-18; Timothy, a young minister (vv, 19-24) and Epaphroditus, a layman (vv. 25-30).

Paul uses these 3 persons to show that the things he has been writing about are possible for the one who will surrender his or her life to God.

CONCLUSIONS

Are you a Christian? Then what are you doing with your Christian life?

Occupation	%
Clergymen	64
Druggists, pharmacists	61
Medical doctors	53
Dentists	51
College teachers	47
Engineers	46
Policemen	42
Bankers	38
TV reporters, commentators	33
Funeral directors	29
Newspaper reporters	26
Lawyers	24
Stockbrokers	19

Occupation	%
Business executives	18
Senators	17
Building contractors	17
Local political officeholders	16
Congressmen	14
Realtors	13
State political officeholders	13
Insurance salesmen	13
Labor union leaders	12
Advertising practitioners	8
Car salesmen	6