

BALANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE:
THE DOING AND THE UNDERGOING:

By Paul R. Shockley

An Exposition of Philippians 2:12-13:

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.¹

I. INTRODUCTION:

Often times when I read accounts or biographies of people who were sold out to Jesus Christ I find myself reflecting upon my own spiritual health; I end up probing my own spiritual life. Why? I want to want to be sold out to Jesus Christ. Hold nothing back, have no regrets, be truly abandoned unto Him. But as I examine myself I also realize the ever-present danger of rationalizing or trying to justify or promote some conception of myself spiritually that is detached from the way things actually are. What I mean is that I can imagine myself to be more spiritually mature than I actually am. Any time I need a reality check all I have to do is talk to my wife, children, and closest confidants. But how does one probe and probe honestly? The answer is simple: ask the right questions and answer candidly as if Jesus Christ himself is asking you those questions and He is ready to hear your answers. What are some good questions to ask with Christ's presence in mind?² Consider the following five-but consider them relation to the backdrop of daily living, that is, how you live your day, day-by-day.

1. Whom do you strive to please in your day-to-day living?
2. What insecurities are you pampering?
3. With whom or what are you competing?
4. What rewards are you seeking?
5. What shame are you covering?

As I read these testimonies about people who were sold out to Jesus Christ, I can't help but share the sentiments of Amy Carmichael. She confessed:

“Sometimes when we read the words of those who have been more than conquerors, we feel almost despondent. I feel that I shall never be like that.”

¹*The New King James Version*. 1982 (Php 2:12-13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² These questions are adapted from Gordon McDonald, *The Life God Blesses* (Nashville: Nelson, 1994), quoted in *Men's Life* (Spring 1998).

But as we know from her life's testimony she was one of those conquerors. But her feelings of inadequacy did not remain or even plague her. From those lives she made an acute observation that was common to all who were sold out to Jesus Christ. Listen to her words as she continues:

“But they won through step by step by little bits of wills [;] little denials of self [;] little inward victories by faithfulness in very little things. They became what they are. No one sees these little hidden steps. They only see the accomplishment, but even so, those small steps were taken. There is no sudden triumph, nor [sudden] spiritual maturity. That is the work of the moment.”³

I could not agree with her more. Authentic spiritual health is obtained in the details, the choices we make, day-by-day, moment-by-moment and time is a succession of moments. In the particular moment we are in, we must make the decision that will give God the most glory. This is our responsibility as people who profess Jesus Christ as Savior.

But as we make those decisions in the moment-by-moment details of living, we must exercise balance. If we fail to exercise balance I don't believe our spiritual life will be healthy. What is the balance I'm talking about? I'm talking about the balance between what two spiritual extremes?

One extreme is to think you must work out your own salvation in your own strength; it is all up to you. This extreme focuses exclusively on what you must do in order to be a godly person. The pronoun, “I” becomes the focus in your decision-making, I'm active and there is little emphasis to depend upon or yield to God.

On the other extreme is the notion that we are not called to do anything; God will do it all. So, instead of “I” the pronoun becomes “He.” For example, “*God will love this person through me; I don't have to will it.*” So, on this extreme, God is active, I'm passive. I play little or no role.

But in Philippians 2:12-13 we find a balance where as I do, I undergo. As I undergo, I do. In other words, I'm called to certain responsibilities while at the same time God is working in me both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Looking at this passage we see that as I obey, God undergirds, and as God undergirds, I obey. Thus, this passage reveals a dynamic, symbiotic relationship between what I do and what God does, all unto God's glory.

Let's open our Bible's to Philippians 2:12-13 and consider this passage in detail. Afterwards we will consider how we should live:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.⁴

³ www.bible.org

⁴The New King James Version.

II. EXPOSITION OF PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13:

Observation # 1: We see the word “therefore.”

“Therefore:”

- A. The “*therefore*” may be translated, “*because of this*.” Therefore, takes the last unit of thought and connects us to this verse here. So, this “therefore” takes us all the way back to verse 1 of chapter 2:

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”

- B. Paul makes an appeal to the Church at Philippi on the basis of their Christian experience to have unity of mind and heart and to put others ahead of themselves. He’s calling them to humility.

- C. But what is humility. In English there are three nuances:

1. Modest: modest and an assuming in attitude and behavior.
2. Respectful: Feeling or showing respect and high esteem toward other people.
3. Lowly: relatively low in rank and without pretensions.
 - a. The Greek word for humility means having the having a humble opinion of one’s self. **2** a deep sense of one’s (moral) littleness. **3** modesty and lowliness of mind.
 - b. Humility is different than tolerance.
 - c. Tolerance is lenience, being open-minded, humility is being unpretentious.
 - d. The opposite of humility is arrogance, superiority, pride and conceit, and the opposite of tolerance is prejudice, bigotry, and fanaticism.
 - e. Humility is the submissive mind-that is, the humble mind that seeks only to honor Christ. As we know from James 4, pride is the cause of much unrest and contention, but humility brings peace and joy. And in this epistle Paul gives four examples for us to follow so that we may achieve the submissive mind of humility: Jesus, Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

- D. Let’s consider the first and greatest example of humility: Philippians 2:6-11:**

Read the passage:

1. Paul points to the attitude of Christ before His incarnation. Was He selfishly trying to hold on to His privileges as God? No! He willingly laid aside His glory and “put on” the form of a servant. He did not cease to be God, but He did set aside His glory and the independent use of His attributes as God. His life as the God-Man on earth was completely subjected to the Father. “I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29). Jesus humbled Himself to become flesh, and then to become sin as He willingly went to the cross. He resigned Himself in doing one thing: Honoring God.
2. But Christ’s experience proves that exaltation always follows humiliation. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,” promises 1 Peter 5:6. The person who exalts himself will be humbled (Luke 14:11). Remember what happened to Pharaoh, King Saul, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, and Herod? We do not worship a “babe in a manger” or a “sacrifice on a cross”; we worship an exalted Lord who is at the right hand of the Father. Christ’s life, death, and resurrection proved eternally that the way to be exalted is to be humbled before God. There is no joy or peace in pride and self-seeking. When we have the submissive mind that Christ had, then we will have the joy and peace that He alone can give.
3. What does humility look like? Once person defined humility as being this: “Humility is not thinking mainly of ourselves; it is just not thinking of ourselves at all.”
4. We are practicing, cultivating humility when we...
 - a. Don’t actively seek self-promotion but Christ.
 - b. Abhor false humility (the appearance of being humble).
 - c. Are accurately aware of our selfishness and tendency to promote ourselves.
 - d. Grieve over our willful acts of selfishness.
 - e. Serve others even if it is inconvenient to our schedule.
 - f. Seek to enable others to succeed.
 - g. Serve others even if it means we have to adjust my own desires or priorities.
 - h. Actively minister to others even if it costs us something and/or we gain no personal self-centered satisfaction from it.
 - i. Seek to glorify Christ, not ourselves in decisions we make
 - j. Serve people we don’t like.
 - k. Dependent upon the Holy Spirit in our daily living.
 - l. Earnestly invite God to both scrutinize our daily life, thoughts, and activities, and convict us.
 - m. When we invite God chastise us, in those selfish areas we find difficult to give up
 - n. Discourage any attempt to promote ourselves over Christ.
 - o. When our conversations do not revolve around us and what we have done...even if it is in the name of the Lord;
 - p. When we are wronged by others and yet maintain a magnanimous disposition.

- q. When we seek no vengeance upon those who have hurt us, whether physically or emotionally.
- r. When our decisions to promote Christ risks suffering, loneliness, deprivation, persecution, and death.
- s. When we are not fearful of looking foolish by others.
- t. When we are not silent in my proclamations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- u. When we are able to love the unlovely.

So, all of that is contained in the word “therefore” in chapter 2:12:

Now, let me move on and re-translate a portion of this passage with therefore in mind:

Because the mind of Christ is to be in you whereby you practice humility that exemplifies Jesus Christ, my dearly-loved friends, as you have always been obedient, or always so careful to follow my instructions, not simply as though I were with you, but all the more because I am away

- E. Focusing on this last statement, ***“as you have always been obedient, not simply as though I were with you, but all the more because I am away,”*** Every time I’ve studied this passage I have asked myself why would a church press on with greater diligence when the apostle is away from them than when he was present with them?”
 - 1. Don’t we tend “slack up”, take a bit of a breather, when we know the boss is away? What was it about this church that made them press even further in view of the apostle’s absence?
 - 2. My own answer to this question, or at least one I found worthy of consideration, came about, interesting enough, when I was reading an account about Leonardo da Vinci.
 - 3. The great Renaissance genius was once at work for a long period of time on a great masterpiece. He had labored long to create this work of art and it was near completion. Standing near him was a young student who spent much of his time with his mouth open, amazed at the master with the brush. Just before he finished the painting, da Vinci turned to the young student and gave him a brush and said, “Now, you finish it.”
 - 4. The student protested and backed away, but da Vinci said, “Will not what I have done inspire you to do your best?”

- F. ***“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”***
 - 1. The special request he had for them, in view of their needs and in view of the example of Christ, is stated powerfully here— **continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.**
 - 2. *“To work out your salvation”* means to put into practice what God has worked in by the Holy Spirit.

- a. Gospel Message;
 - b. You are united in Christ.
3. Said differently, "... 'work out' has in it the idea to 'translate.' Translate what you know into action.... The problem is translating what is known into daily conduct. While we might score high on what we know, we may not score very high on how we translate what we know into action. Work out the salvation that God has given you in a life that is in perfect harmony with that salvation."⁵
4. There are three other occurrences of "*fear and trembling*" in the N.T.
- a. It is seen in 1 Cor. 2:3 whereby Paul may have to come to Corinth in "*fear and trembling*" not because of any experience with other people but because of the awesome task of preaching Christ crucified (cf. 2 Cor. 2:16).
 - b. The Corinthians received Titus "*with fear and trembling*" (2 Cor. 7:15) perhaps as much to indicate their fear of God in light of the past rejection of Paul, his apostle, as to show to Titus their willingness to hear him out. The idea in 2 Corinthians 7:15 is giving attention to an honored guest so that his every wish should immediately be met.⁶
5. Slaves are to submit to their masters "*fear and trembling*" "*just as they would obey Christ*" (Eph. 6:5).
- a. See, the apostle's use of this phrase is the idea of a passion to please.⁷
 - b. "You work out your own salvation with a deep passion and trembling desire to do the right."⁸
 - c. I take it that when Paul says in Phil. 2:12 that believers must "*work out their salvation,*" he means that they should conduct themselves "*in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ*" (1:27) with a passion to please Him."
6. Let me re-translate this passage:

Because the mind of Christ is to be in you whereby you practice humility that exemplifies Jesus Christ, my dearly-loved friends, who seek to do your very best even more so when I'm not there, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the mindset to please Him; offer your utmost to Him.

⁵Pentecost, *The Joy of Living*, 87.

⁶Ibid., 88.

⁷Idem.

⁸Ibid., 87.

E. In my own strength I realize that there would be no way I could cultivate Christ-like humility, Moreover, my mindset is not to make it my desire to please him, but to please myself. But the Apostle Paul does not offer this command without reminding us that we can't do it on our own:

¹³ *for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

1. He Works in us to serve Him on His terms for His good pleasure.
 - a. God provides the will and the ability to accomplish “*His good purpose.*”
 - b. The way it is written here is very emphatic: “*It is God who works in you*” rather than simply saying “*God works in you.*”
 - c. In fact, *God* is in an emphatic position in the Greek text. The way it is constructed in the Greek, the force of the present participle “*working*” is continuous. It means He is *always at work*. The word usually carries the idea of effective working (Rom 7.5; Gal 5.6).
 - d. Looking at the phrase, “*God works in you*” the “*In you*” can mean “*in your hearts.*” Your heart, if you recall, is the control center of your personality. It is the seat of your affections
 - e. Now, if that is the case that he is *always* at work effectively in your affections, then, we need to realize that this on-going work is not just occurring when we are studying the Scripture, praying, or ministering to someone, or even going to church:
 1. It is occurring when you are at work making decisions;
 2. You are enduring Houston heat;
 3. You are being entertained;
 4. You are by yourself;
 5. When you are doing the same thing for the thousandth time;
 6. When you are cleaning your home;
 7. And quite possibly, when you are staying behind when all your friends are in Colorado on a church-wide retreat.
 - f. But at the same time, we are to work out our salvation by:
Positively:
 1. Being faithful to God in the little things;
 2. Practicing honesty in your daily dealings with people;
 3. Acting quickly against the first temptations of sins;
 4. Cultivating holiness in the decisions you make;
 5. Pursuing what matters most to God;
 6. Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
 7. Promoting God's interests wherever you are;

In sum, it is yielding to God in the details of daily living.

Negatively:

8. Refusing to commit one more white lie;
9. Saying no to self-centered agendas;
10. Letting go of past hurts, envy, and bitterness;
11. Saying no to sexual immorality;
12. Not participating in gossip;
13. Abstaining from the mindset that you are some how better than another.

In sum, it is putting to death sinful appetites and fleshly tendencies.

- g. So while we should work out what God has worked in, we have to realize that it is God who undergirds it all. In fact, any resultant fruit comes from Him. Our responsibility is trust Him as we take each step in our walk with him.

But here's the thing: There are some sins we don't want to give up. There are sins we want to keep locked away, we want to groom, we want to cultivate. We don't want to give them up!

- h. But He makes us willing and gives us the energy to do what He wants.

- i. He is the one who is working our hearts, inspiring will and our action.

1. The phrase, "***both to will and to do for His good pleasure***" means "the will to desire and the power to achieve"). *Willing* here is certainly more than mere "wishing"; it involves a "focused" determination. *To make you willing* may be rendered as "cause you to want to," or even "cause you to be glad to."⁹
2. The focus is on God; it is his good pleasure, and *to obey his own purpose*, "*to carry out his loving purpose*"; "*to act as He pleases*"; *Phps* "*to achieve his purpose*"; "*to achieve what his purpose has planned for you*").¹⁰

Consider this:

3. Left to our own, who wants to practice humility, serve the interests of other beyond what we want and desire? Who wants to honor God with one's very best with a passion for excellence? Who wants to live moment-by-moment with the desire for the glory of God? First, we lack fervency to do so and second we are unable to do so in our strength.

⁹Loh, I., & Nida, E. A. (1995), c1977). *A handbook on Paul's letter to the Philippians*. Originally published: A translators handbook on Paul's letter to the Philippians, c1977. UBS Helps for translators; UBS handbook series (69). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁰Ibid., 90.

4. Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost puts it this way:

The believer by nature has neither the desire nor the ability to put another above himself because his own sinful heart is selfish and considers his own good instead of the good of another. In light of this problem, the apostle said, "It is God which worketh in you." You work out, but it is God who works in you. He works on our will so we become willing. The willing has to do with the inception, with the desire. It is God's response to our "*I don't want to.*" God plants the desire. It is also God who gives the ability to do what we now desire, for it is God who not only plants the desire but works the doing of His good pleasure.¹¹

- F. So, let me re-translate both verses 12-13:

Because the mind of Christ is to be in you whereby you practice humility that exemplifies Jesus Christ, my dearly-loved friends, who seek to do your very best even more so when I'm not there, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; offer your utmost to Him, for it is God Himself whose power creates within you both the desire and the enablement to execute his gracious will.

III. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

- A. Some of you may be asking then, if God is working in me then why am I not more spiritually mature, spiritually more dynamic than I am. Why aren't I sold out to Jesus Christ like the spiritual biographies we read or the stories we heard:
- B. Simply put, if it is not ignorance, then the bottom line is that we refuse to submit to the Lord in the details of daily life...in those little, detailed, decisions. God is doing His work but the dynamic comes when we work together, step-by-step in intimacy with Him.
- C. It is sorta like a marriage. One spouse wants to work through the problems, but the other does not. The other wants to hold on to past, the anger, the resentment, the conflict, or even walk away, remain distant; too much water under the bridge. But a successful marriage is one where both partners work together through the thick and thin, the mountains and the valleys, the ups and the downs. It is commitment.

The analogy does run short. With marital problems neither spouse is perfect. God is Perfect. The problem will never be on His end and He will never walk away. He will never leave you. He is always in pursuit.

So, God has committed Himself to you, but have you responded to His voice, His urgings, His convictions, His prompting... to make this the most dynamic relationship possible? Once again, a healthy Christian marriage, one that really makes a difference, is one where both spouses work hand-in-hand together-no matter what for one overall purpose: The exemplification of Jesus Christ; the glorification of God; The completion of His will.

¹¹Idem.

But why do we refuse?

1. For some it is fear to let go of what we have to live for God. But consider the wisdom gained from experience in the life of Corrie Ten Boom. She once said, "*I have learned to hold everything loosely. That way it doesn't hurt when God takes them from me.*" Ask God to help you let go of what is not important and invite Him to carry out His will in your life

Consider A.W. Tozer's prayer:

Father, I want to know Thee, but my coward heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival. Then shalt Thou make the place of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus's name. Amen.

3. For others, it is too many diversions. Like a water pitcher filled with too many holes, business serves no one. In contrast, consider the words of the missionary Jim Elliot. His life's testimony may be summarized in a famous statement he once gave before he was killed by the Auca Indians in an effort to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

"Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."

4. For others it is pride, stubbornness that is keeping us from surrendering to these truths. We want even want God to use us, but on our terms, not His.

Ask God to take down your pride and replace it with humility.

Lord, I am willing
To receive what You give
To lack what You withhold
To relinquish what You take
To suffer what You inflict
And Lord, if others are to be Your messengers to me
I am willing to hear and heed
What they have to say, Amen.

Ladies and gentlemen, the biggest battles fought and the victories that follow are often unseen by anyone but you. Sometimes it takes months to look back and even realize you came out of the battle as a conqueror.

IV. CONCLUSION:

"Sometimes when we read the words of those who have been more than conquerors, we feel almost despondent. I feel that I shall never be like that. But they won through step by step by

little bits of wills [;] little denials of self [;] little inward victories by faithfulness in very little things. They became what they are. No one sees these little hidden steps. They only see the accomplishment, but even so, those small steps were taken. There is no sudden triumph, no [sudden] spiritual maturity. That is the work of the moment.”¹²

¹² www.bible.org