

Fact Sheet for “God’s Work or My Work?” Philippians 2:12-13

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How are you doing in life? Do you sense God’s leading or is life out of control? Do you see God’s hand moving? Are you encouraged? Are you challenged in your faith? Are you living in consistency with God’s word? These two verses will help.

¹² ¶ **Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but 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 work for his good pleasure.**

These are two verses that bring together God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. Initially we may be a little taken back. “Is my salvation God’s work or is it my work?” After all we are told here to work out our own salvation. But earlier Paul had made it clear that our salvation was God’s work (Philippians 1:3-7). So how does Philippians 2:12-13 fit into this? Let’s look at a few words from Philippians 2:12-13.

Therefore

This word can also be translated “so that” and connects what Paul is now saying to the previous context (Philippians 2:2).

my beloved

This shows Paul’s relationship with the Philippians.

work out

Now, these are words that require some thought. (*They translate one word in the original.*) We use these words in different ways. 1. “Work out”, exercise 2. “Work out” the answer. “Work out” a solution to the problem.

I remember algebra class. We not only had to figure out the answer by the methods we had learned... we also had to show our work. There are other problems in life where we just need to keep pressing until we “work out” or find a solution. But this NT word has a different meaning altogether. Here are some ESV verses where it is used.

ESV **Romans 1:27** committing
ESV **Romans 7:18** to carry it out.
ESV **2 Corinthians 5:5** prepared
ESV **Ephesians 6:13** having done
ESV **James 1:3** produces

This NT word points to the things that are produced in our lives, not solutions to problems that we haven’t discovered yet. And Paul communicates this in the form of a command, something that they must do. Their will is involved. Now, what does Paul say we are to “work out”?

your own salvation

Notice that he does *not* say that we are to *work* our own salvation. He says that we are to *work out* our own salvation

with fear and trembling

This fear and trembling is not something that we should work to produce for its own sake. It is a right reaction when we have a high view of God. Know Him and His word!

Do your actions and attitudes show what God is pleased with? Are you matching up your choices with what you know of God and his word?

for it is God who works

Here “works” is not “works out”. This points to the effective work of God in our lives.

in you

Don’t overlook these two words, thinking they are insignificant. They will set the meaning of the following words. God “works” in us so that we are able to “work out” the character qualities, deeds, and attitudes that are consistent with the salvation we have in Christ.

both to will and to work for His good pleasure

Here’s the big question. Does this mean that God works in us according to His will and His good pleasure? Or does this mean that God works to produce in us the will and the work that He is pleased with? Here are some quotes.

“God makes His own both willing and desirous to do His work.”¹

“Paul describes the enablement to carry out the exhortation as being furnished by God himself, who produces in believers both the desire to live righteously and the effective energy to do so.”²

“God’s work in them produced both the motivation and the ability to do his good pleasure.”³

Here is the rendering of Philippians 2:12-13 in the NLT...

NLT Philippians 2:12-13 ¶ Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. ¹³ For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

God works to produce in us the will and the work that He is pleased with.

Here’s another question. How does God sovereignly work with people? Consider Abraham’s progress of faith in Genesis 12-22. Think about God’s working behind the scenes with Esther. Meditate on God’s leading of Joseph. Look for God’s hand in Kings and Chronicles (for example 2 Chronicles 28:1, 5). God has also sovereignly chosen to work through the prayers of his people (for example Philippians 1:19).

Now be careful. Our efforts *NEVER* trump God’s sovereignty, but they *are* part of God’s sovereign plan for us. Here’s the problem that shows up more than we would like to admit. We believe what Philippians 2:12-13 says, but we may have difficulty trusting what it says. Believing is a head matter. Trusting is a continual act of our will. Do you trust God’s sovereign choices for your life? Do you see Him moving in your life? Are you willing to trust His word and live by it? Are you willing to trust Him for the outcome?

I know I have to keep reminding myself about these things.

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p.655.

² The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11, p.128.

³ The New American Commentary, Volume 32, p. 111.