

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**  
**Senior Pastor Titus Green**  
**March 12, 2023**  
**God At Work In You**  
**Philippians 2:12-13**

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Years ago, I learned about a figure of speech often used by entertainers or public speakers to get the attention of their audience. It's called a paraprosdokian. A paraprosdokian is a sentence or phrase in which the second half is surprising or unexpected in a way that causes you to reinterpret the first half. Let me give you a few examples:

- Groucho Marx: I've had a perfectly wonderful evening, but this wasn't it.
- Mark Twain: Giving up smoking is the easiest thing in the world. I know because I've done it thousands of times.
- Winston Churchill: We can always count on the Americans to do the right thing, after they have exhausted all the other possibilities.
- Ronald Reagan: Thomas Jefferson once said, "We should never judge a president by his age, only by his works." And ever since he told me that, I stopped worrying.

I think you get the drift. The reason I mention paraprosdokians is that our text this morning is the ultimate example of one. We are looking at two verses of Scripture, and we are going to definitely need the second verse to help us understand the first.

***Philippians 2:12-13***

***<sup>12</sup> 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, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

I hope you see what I meant about the paraprosdokians. Verse 12 is one of those often misunderstood and misapplied verses of Scripture. People isolate verse 12 from verse 13 and use it to say that the Bible teaches us that we have to work in order to be saved from the penalty and power of sin. But, when you consider what the rest of the Bible says about salvation, you know the Scripture paints a very different picture.

- *Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, not a result of works so that no one may boast."*
- *Titus 3:5, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."*
- *Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

The clear teaching of the Bible is that we are saved by the grace of God the Father through the work of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. He does it. All of it. God saves us from the penalty of sin. God saves us from the power of sin. And, one day, God will save us from the very presence of

sin by allowing us to live with Him in heaven. Our part is simply to repent of our sin by turning to Jesus in humble faith.

So, how does our text reconcile with the rest of the Bible's teaching on salvation? Well, that's where my opening illustration is helpful. We need the second part of our text to understand the first part.

So, look at verse 13: ***for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

Do you see the first word of verse 13? It's the word "for." That word is known as a "causal conjunction." It's a conjunction. That simply means it joins two phrases or sentences to each other. And it's causal because it shows you the cause for something. It's basically the word "because."

For instance, I can't stand driving on Courtenay Parkway because the traffic is a nightmare. I'm using the word "because" to show you the reason I'm saying the first part of the sentence. And that's how verse 13 helps us understand verse 12.

Paul is saying we should work out our salvation in fear and trembling not because we have to do the work to save ourselves but because God is doing a work that saves us. Salvation is already at work in you, if you are trusting in Jesus. So, you aren't working to get saved, you are working because you are already saved. Our good works don't cause our salvation, our salvation causes our good works.

Think of it this way. If you go to the gym to lift weights, you are going to build your muscles. You aren't working out to create muscles. That's not how it works. You already have muscles. You are born with muscles. You couldn't work out if you didn't already have muscles. You work out to develop muscle, but you are dependent on the muscles you already have to work out.

And that's how it works in our salvation. We are dependent on the salvation God is already working within us to do the good works that accompany salvation.

And notice just how comprehensive God's work is in our salvation. Verse 13 says God is at work in us to will and to work for His good pleasure.

**God works in our will.** The word "will" means "to have a want or desire for something." Let's play a little game. I'm going to tell you 4 things I do on a regular basis. And I do each one of them for the same reason. See if you can guess the reason I do these 4 things.

- I regularly eat ice cream.
- I regularly listen to Garth Brooks.
- I regularly floss my teeth.
- I regularly change the oil in my vehicles.

And I do all of those things for the same reason. Can you guess it? Because I want to.

It's why I do everything I do. I do what I do because I want to. And I'm not unique. That's true about you, too. You do what you do because, at some level, you want to. That's why we say that the things that are done to us that we don't want to be done to us happen "against our will."

And what verse 13 is telling us is that if we are going to want to do what is pleasing to God, that will only happen as God does a work that changes what we want. God has to change our desires or we will never want what we should want the way we should want it. You see, our hearts have all been distorted by sin.

*Romans 3:10–12*

*10 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*

All of us have indwelling sin that has twisted our desires. We don't want what we should want. So, we don't do what we should do. And, even when we do what we should do, sin inevitably gets attached to it. For instance, when we help someone out, our hearts grow proud, and we hope someone finds out about it so they will think highly of us or we hope the person we helped will pay us back. Sin has distorted our desires.

We need God to change our hearts. And that's exactly what God does when He saves us. He starts with our hearts. He changes our desires. And, like we saw last week, growing in our salvation is a process of maturity that happens over time. So, the change might seem small or subtle at first. But, if our hearts are going to change, God has to do it through the Spirit of Christ in us..."God, change my heart."

**God works in our works.** That's what verse 13 says. It is God who works in you to will and to work. The word "work" in verse 13 is the Greek word "energeo." We have a word in English that comes directly from that Greek word. It's the word "energy." That Greek word literally means "to put one's capabilities into operation." That word is used twice in verse 13. The first time is referring to God's work. And what is God working to do? To work in our work. God is putting His capabilities into operation in us. In other words, He is giving us His ability to do what only He can do.

Just think about that for a moment. God is giving us His ability to live. He is energizing our works. Think about a light bulb. A light bulb is designed to produce light. But, light bulbs can't produce light by their own power, can they? They have to be plugged into a source of energy, of power. They need something they don't have in themselves to produce what they were designed to produce.

And, you and I were designed by God to produce good works. But, we can't produce good works by our own power. Our sin has robbed us of the power to do any good thing. That's why we need Jesus. Last week, we saw that Jesus came into this world to take our sin upon Himself at the cross. And the Bible teaches that when we come to trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God miraculously unites us to Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit. And, since we are united to Jesus, we are united to His death. That's how our sin is paid for and forgiven so that we can be restored to God. But we aren't just united to the death of Jesus. We are also united to His resurrection power So that Christ can work in and through our lives.

And that's what verse 13 is saying. God has to work in us to produce the will and the work that pleases Him. Once again, that's something the entire Bible tells us.

*Galatians 2:20*

*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

*1 Corinthians 15:10*

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*

*Colossians 1:29*

*For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

*Philippians 1:6*

*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

The clear teaching of the Bible is that God is the One who works in and through us by His power to produce the works He has called us to do. It's all by God's grace through Jesus as we trust in Christ. You've heard me say it before but it's worth repeating every week. Christianity is not primarily about a work Jesus is calling us to do for Him, it's primarily a work He is promising to do in us.

So, our text is the furthest thing from saying we have to work for our salvation. God is the One who does the work of salvation. We don't rip verse 12 out of context and make it seem like we have to work to produce our own salvation. But, by the same token, we don't rip verse 13 out of context and make it seem like being saved means it doesn't matter how we live. Being saved by God means He is doing a work **IN** us by His gracious power that is intended to work itself **OUT** of us in our obedience.

And that gives us our big idea for this morning...

**Big Idea: God is working in us a salvation that works out of us.**

And, in the time we have left, I want us to take the whole truth of our text and consider two practical implications for our lives as followers of Jesus.

**1. God desires for us to live in complete obedience to Him.**

***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,***

When Paul talks about working out our salvation, he equates it with obedience. And notice what he says about obeying. He says they should do it when he is around. And, he says they should do it even more when he isn't around. Guys, I know I'm just a simple kid from Ohio who grew up looking

at the cornfield that was right outside my front door, so I might be pretty simple in my approach to this. But, if they are supposed to obey Jesus when Paul is around and when he isn't around, then when should they obey Jesus? All the time. When is it okay to disobey Jesus? Never.

God is calling us to complete obedience. We are supposed to obey Jesus all the time. Obey Jesus when people are watching and obey Jesus when people aren't watching. Always obey Jesus. In everything, obey Jesus. No matter what, obey Jesus.

Church, beware of any so-called version of Christianity that minimizes obedience because that isn't true Christianity. If you aren't following the commands of Jesus, then you don't have any reason to think you are a follower of Jesus.

I'm not sure how it happened, but somewhere along the way we seemed to stop talking about simple obedience. People are constantly looking for trendy, pop-psychology in the guise of Christianity. We want 7 tips on being a better parent or 10 steps to a healthy marriage or 5 principles to successful citizenship. Well, I think I might write a book called the one step program; a single, time-tested, God-approved approach to life that I guarantee will revolutionize your marriage and empower your parenting and impact your citizenship? It doesn't rhyme, so I hope you can remember it: obey Jesus all the time in everything you do! You want to know the will of God for your life? I can tell you: God's will is that you would obey Jesus and all His commands.

- Husbands, obey Jesus and all His commands.
- Wives, obey Jesus and all His commands.
- Parents, obey Jesus and all His commands.
- Children, obey Jesus and all His commands.
- Young adults, obey Jesus and all His commands.
- Church members, obey Jesus and all His commands.

I'm not sure I've made myself clear, so let me try it another way. If you want the life that Jesus promises to bless, then do what Jesus says. Even if our world thinks you're crazy for doing it.

And this is such serious business that Paul says we should obey in fear and trembling. Why? Why should we have fear and trembling? Well, verse 12 starts with the word "therefore." And that means we are supposed to consider what he said right before verse 12. So, what does verse 11 say?

### ***Philippians 2:9–11***

***9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

The day is coming when we will be presented before Jesus Christ. And, on that day, we will all bow before Jesus and acknowledge Him as Lord. And, on that day, our lives will be judged. Every thought, word, and deed will be laid bare before the Lord. And our lives will either show that we lived

as though Jesus is Lord or they will show that our lives were lived like Jesus isn't our Lord. And that thought should cause a holy trembling to occur in our hearts.

*Luke 6:46*

*"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"*

There is no use in saying Jesus is our Lord if we don't live like He has the right to tell us how to live. So, let me just ask you, "Are you living like Jesus is your Lord? Are you obeying Him in every area of your life?"

Would you ask the Holy Spirit to show you any areas of your life that aren't obedient to the call of Christ? Repent. Turn from sin. Obey Jesus. God desires for us to live in complete obedience to Jesus.

## **2. God desires for us to live in complete confidence in Him.**

**Verse 13: *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.***

Remember, this call to obedience is based on something and it isn't your ability. So, as your heart is stirred to be obedient to Jesus, the worst thing you can do is roll up your sleeves and get to work in your own strength trying to obey Jesus. If you could completely obey what God says by your own strength, then we wouldn't need Jesus! The call to complete obedience is attached to the promise of God's power. He has promised to unleash His ability in you. Let me ask you this: How able is God to do what He commands? He's perfectly able! And, He has promised to give you His ability to live as you trust in Jesus.

And faith takes that promise of God and puts it into practice. It says, "I know I can't do it, but I believe Jesus can and I believe Jesus will." And faith steps into obedience with confidence in Jesus.

Think about when Jesus was standing on the water and told Peter to get out of the boat and walk to Him. Peter was a fisherman. He had spent his entire life on the water. Do you think he thought he could walk on water like Jesus? Think about it. In one way, he knew he couldn't walk on water. He knew it was impossible. But, in another way, he absolutely thought he could walk on water like Jesus. That's why he stepped out of the boat. What happened to cause Peter to step out of the boat? Listen to what Peter said.

*Matthew 14:28-29*

*28 And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.*

Peter knew the secret. He knew that if Jesus commands His people to do something Jesus will use His power to make them able to do whatever He commands. And faith steps into obedience because faith is confident in Christ's power.

- So, husbands, what would it look like if you were confident that Jesus would enable you to love your wife like Christ loved the church?

- Wives, what would it look like if you were confident that Jesus would enable you to respect your husbands in honor of Christ?
- Children, what would it look like if you were confident that Jesus would enable you to honor your parents and do what they say?
- Singles, what would it look like if you were confident that Jesus would enable you to remain pure in your minds and your actions before marriage?

What would it look like if you were confident that Jesus would enable you to love your neighbor as yourself and do all things without murmuring or arguing, like verse 14 commands? Or to rejoice in all things like Philippians 4 commands? Or being bold to tell others about Jesus like Acts 1:8 commands? Or, to give generously like 2 Corinthians 9 commands? Or to be truthful in all things like Ephesians 4 commands?

What would change about the way you live if you were confident that Jesus would give you His ability to live? Well, that's exactly what He has promised to do! That's the salvation Jesus offers. He saves us from the penalty of sin by His gracious work AND He saves us to a life of righteous obedience by His gracious work.

So, hear the word of God for us this morning: Obey Jesus in all things at all times, because it is God who is at work in you as you trust in Jesus! God is working in you a salvation that works out of you!

And remember, the place where Jesus starts is in our hearts. He changes our desires: "Jesus, change my heart. Help me to want your righteousness, your holiness, your way of life more than I want the stuff of this world."