

Philippians 2:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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.

Analysis

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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 (Ὡστε, ἀγαπητοί μου, καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε, μὴ ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου, μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε, Hōste, agapētoi mou, kathōs pantote hypēkousate, mē hōs en tē parousia mou monon alla nyn pollō mallon en tē apousia mou, meta phobou kai tromou tēn heautōn sōtērian katergazesthe)—Hōste ("therefore, so then") applies the Christ-hymn: Christ's obedience (v. 8) models believers' obedience.

Katergazesthe (present middle imperative, "work out, accomplish") is key. Not "work for" (earning) but "work out" (unfolding what's already given). Sōtērian ("salvation") here is sanctification—progressive holiness, not initial justification. Meta phobou kai tromou ("with fear and trembling") indicates reverent seriousness, not terror. The phrase appears in OT (Ps 2:11) and Paul (1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 7:15; Eph 6:5) for appropriate awe before God. Obedience in Paul's absence tests genuineness—is it people-pleasing or God-fearing?

Historical Context

The Philippians had demonstrated consistent obedience since their founding (Acts 16). Paul's imprisonment tested their perseverance without apostolic presence.

'Work out salvation' doesn't contradict justification by faith (Eph 2:8-9) but describes sanctification's necessary progress. Ancient philosophers distinguished learning from a teacher versus internalizing teaching independently. Paul calls for mature, self-motivated holiness.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What's the difference between 'working for' salvation (impossible) and 'working out' salvation (imperative)?
2. How does 'fear and trembling' before God differ from servile terror or casual presumption?
3. Is your obedience consistent in others' absence, or dependent on accountability and observation?

Interlinear Text

Ὡστε	ἀγαπητοί	μου	καθὼς	πάντοτε	ὑπηκούσατε	μὴ		
Wherefore	beloved	my	as	always	obeyed	not		
G5620	G27	G3450	G2531	G3842	G5219	G3361		
ὥς	ἐν	τῇ	παρουσία	μου	μόνον	ἀλλὰ	νῦν	πολλῶ
as	in	G3588	presence	my	only	but	now	much
G5613	G1722		G3952	G3450	G3440	G235	G3568	G4183
μᾶλλον	ἐν	τῇ	ἀπουσία	μου	μετὰ	φόβου	καὶ	τρόμου
more	in	G3588	absence	my	with	fear	and	trembling
G3123	G1722		G666	G3450	G3326	G5401	G2532	G5156
τὴν	ἑαυτῶν	σωτηρίαν	κατεργάζεσθε·					
G3588	your own	salvation	work out					
	G1438	G4991	G2716					

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 15:58 (Love): Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Hebrews 4:11 (Parallel theme): Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

1 Peter 2:11 (Love): Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

Matthew 11:29 (Parallel theme): Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Philippians 1:27 (Parallel theme): Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Isaiah 66:2 (Parallel theme): For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

2 Peter 3:18 (Salvation): But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Hebrews 5:9 (Salvation): And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

Proverbs 13:4 (Parallel theme): The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

2 Timothy 2:10 (Salvation): Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

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