

# 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** (Ὥστε, 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 ἔαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε, Ήστε, 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

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**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

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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

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Ὥστε ἀγαπητοί μου καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε μὴ  
Wherefore beloved my as always obeyed not  
G5620 G27 G3450 G2531 G3842 G5219 G3361

ώς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῷ  
as in presence my only but now much  
G5613 G1722 G3588 G3952 G3450 G3440 G235 G3568 G4183

μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου  
more in absence my with fear and trembling  
G3123 G1722 G3588 G666 G3450 G3326 G5401 G2532 G5156

τὴν ἔαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε·  
G3588 your own salvation work out  
G1438 G4991 G2716

## Additional Cross-References

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**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.