

## Work Out Your Own Salvation

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The apostle Paul understood that individual responsibility and effort was required on the part of anyone wishing to inherit everlasting life, which is a gift from God. His own life and works were a testimony to what Paul taught as he struggled with his own problems as well as dealing with those who were attacking the early church of God (cf. 2Cor. 11:22-33; Rom. 7:24; 8:9-13; Gal. 1:6-7; 2:4-6; Col. 2:8, 18; 2Ti. 2:16-18). Therefore if anyone, other than Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 5:8-9), had the right to speak about the subject of working out your own salvation, it would be Paul,

Therefore, my beloved (brethren in the Body of Christ), as you have always obeyed (the word of God), not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12; NKJV throughout unless noted; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Paul's struggles did not end until he was poured out as a drink offering in service to Almighty God,

Yes, and if I (Paul) am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all (Phil. 2:17; Ed. note in parenthesis).

As Paul was speaking to those in the early church who had already repented of living in sin, and been baptized, his comment about working out their own salvation is very important. Why? Because in today's Christianity it is often taught that once someone "accepts Jesus Christ", there is no further requirement to continue overcoming sinful tendencies because Christ "fulfilled" that for everyone who, either repents of sin or, simply "accepts him into their hearts".

For those who believe they do need to continue overcoming sinful thoughts and actions following their repentance and baptism, Paul's statement in Philippians 2:12 holds another important lesson that will be addressed later in this study.

When Paul advised Timothy about his responsibilities as a servant of God, he pointed out that Timothy had to apply himself diligently to God's work, and the most important aspect of his work was to depart from anything that could be construed as sinful,

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings (empty chatter), for they will increase (lead) to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless **the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal** 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, '**Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity**' (2Ti. 2:15-19; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

So Paul is making it very plain to Timothy that anyone who refers to themselves as a Christian must depart from iniquity (evil, wickedness, lawlessness, sin), which is defined

as transgressing the law of God (cf. 1Jn. 3:4). This truth is fundamental and those who seek diligently to obey every word of God are regarded as being sealed for everlasting life providing they continue doing so until the end of their lives (cf. Mt. 10:22; Mk. 13:13),

Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 'Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place (an opportunity) to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification (building up), that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God (by being willfully disobedient to God's word; cf. Heb. 10:26-31), by which **you were sealed for the day of redemption** (Eph. 4:25-30; cf. Rev. 7:3-8; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

When sin occurred during the First Covenant period, effort was required on the part of the sinner in order to be restored in their relationship with Almighty God. They usually had to offer up an animal which had value to them (cf. Lev. 22:17-25; Dt. 17:1). This animal's shed blood was a substitute that symbolized the death of the sinner for his/her sin/s (cf. Heb. 9:22). This lesson was to reinforce how serious sin was and that the sinner should think twice before committing the same sinful act again. This principle of sacrifice for sin has not changed today nor has its purpose, which is to teach the sinner to cease from their sins. All the spiritual aspects of God's law and commandments stand forever (cf. Mal. 3:6; Rom. 7:12, 14; Jas. 1:17). The only change was from the sacrifice of animals to that of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 10:4). After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all repentant sinners are to ask for God's forgiveness in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself in order to make restoration between man and God possible on an ongoing basis. If individuals decide to sin willfully after they have come to understand how serious sin is and the incredible price that Christ paid in order to provide **the way** for them to be forgiven (cf. Jn. 14:6), there is no other hope of restoration until the second resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6),

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the **adversaries** (Heb. 10:26-27; emphasis added).

Anyone who thinks they can continue to disobey Almighty God, and somehow be justified because Jesus Christ died for them, is described in Hebrews 10:27 as an adversary of God. Yes, those who repented of sin and were baptized still sin due to their weaknesses, but they are to ask for forgiveness in Christ's name in order to maintain their relationship with Almighty God who cannot co-exist with someone who persists in living a sinful life. Paul described this battle against sin and confirmed that Christ's sacrifice was the means through which we could be forgiven on an ongoing basis,

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good (right). But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me [that is, in my flesh] nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. **For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.** But I see

another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Rom. 7:14-25; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Why would Paul have agonized over sin, that does so easily beset (entangle) us (cf. Heb 12:1), if he believed it was not his responsibility to battle against it with God's help in the knowledge that he could ask for forgiveness in Christ's name when he fell short? The answer should be obvious. Paul knew he could not give in to sin, which is why he said that each member of the Body of Christ has a responsibility to 'work out their own salvation.' In other words, effort is required. Sometimes this effort is very intense, which is why Christ said the following,

**But from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens is forced, and those using force** (those fighting to resist sinful practices) **seize it** (through great effort) (Mt. 11:12; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

One of the grand deceptions in modern Christianity is the teaching that obedience to the law and commandments of God is an attempt to earn everlasting life through one's own works. Nothing could be further from the truth. Forgiveness of sin is granted by God. No human being can earn this forgiveness. Instead, it is a gift from God and an expression of His love and mercy for all who have sinned (cf. Jn. 3:16). However, once an individual understands their sins have separated them from Almighty God and that they need to repent and start living a totally different life, why would they continue living in sin after they have been 'freely' forgiven? This is an illogical position, and yet it is used to discredit those who are 'working out their own salvation' in a very sober and serious manner. This sober and serious approach to sin is described by Paul in the following terms,

... work out your own salvation **with fear and trembling** (Phil. 2:12b; emphasis added).

If Christianity today was working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, they would refuse to participate in sinful practices. Some of these sinful practices are blatantly obvious such as celebrating pagan days of worship on October 31, December 25, January 1, Easter, etc.. Observing God's weekly Sabbath on Sunday is also a sin because Almighty God never changed His Sabbath day from the 7<sup>th</sup> (Saturday) to the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week (Sunday; cf. Mal. 3:6; Ex. 31:13; Isa. 66:22-23; Mt. 5:17-19; Heb. 4:4-11).

This leads to the next point regarding 'working out your own salvation.' Many people, who regard themselves as being religious, observe what they have been taught by others without questioning or proving whether the doctrines are correct according to Holy Scripture. They simply go along with the teachings because everyone else in their respective family, church, or culture has been doing it that way for generations. So no effort is required. If these teachings, traditions, and doctrines are contrary to God's law and commandments, everyone who follows along with them will be guilty of sin whether they are aware of it or not. Even those, who are convinced that their church leaders are telling them the truth, could be wrong. Jesus Christ pointed out that religious leaders are

the primary source of misinformation when it comes to properly teaching God's truth to others,

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you go about the sea and the dried out places to make one proselyte, and when it happens, you make him a son of Gehenna (A continually burning rubbish pit in a valley S. of Jerusalem where trash, dead criminals and dead animals were cast out from the city) **twofold more than you** (Mt. 23:15; RNT; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The probability is high that many people, who come up in the second resurrection (cf. Rev. 20:4-6), will claim they were just following the teachings of their religious leaders when they unknowingly broke many of God's laws and commandments. For instance, if a religious organization convinces its followers they should obey the first day of the week (Sunday) as God's Sabbath, everyone in that fellowship will be guilty of breaking the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11). If a religious organization claims that Jesus Christ was born on December 25<sup>th</sup> and this date should be set aside for observance, they are lying to their congregation and leading them to break the first commandment (Ex. 20:3) because no one except Almighty God is to be worshipped (cf. Rev. 22:8-9).

"There are many people who have commented on war atrocities where average citizens were "just following orders" from their superiors when they carried out crimes against humanity. Quite rightly, this excuse for carrying out atrocities against innocent people is not justified by the majority of people today. Instead, it is understood that following orders needs to be examined from a moral and ethical perspective. In other words, you cannot justify sinful and evil practices by simply stating that you had to follow orders no matter what the actions and consequences were. A similar principle applies to sinful practices that people are doing now. If these same people take the position that they are innocent because they were just following the orders of their religious leaders, God will not excuse them (cf. Lev. 5:17). Instead, He has provided many scriptures showing that everyone has a personal responsibility to make sure their beliefs and practices are in accordance with His law and commandments,

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, **that you may prove** what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:2; emphasis added).

In this last scripture, Paul is stating that it is an individual responsibility to prove through scripture what conduct is acceptable to God. He did not admonish the members of the early church to simply follow orders from others who claimed to be superior in religious knowledge,

Examine yourselves (those in the Body of Christ) as to whether you are in the faith. **Prove (test) yourselves.** Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you are disqualified (2Cor. 13:5; emphasis added).

Again, Paul shows that each individual must prove what is right and wrong according to God's word. There is no room for making the excuse that, "I was just following the orders of those who are in positions of authority because they know more than I do

about religious matters; so there is no need on my part to question what they are telling me to do. "Paul continues this theme in the book of Galatians,

But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, **and not in another**. For each one shall bear his own load (Gal. 6:4-5; emphasis added).

Paul is making it plain that we are accountable for what we do during our physical lifetime. We cannot blame someone else by saying that we were blindly following them because we thought they had all the right answers regarding Biblical doctrine. Just because someone claims to know or represent God's truth accurately, it is not a guarantee that their understanding is correct. They could be genuine about their beliefs, but they could be genuinely wrong,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because **many false prophets have gone out into the world** (1Jn. 4:1; emphasis added).

At this point the question regarding how to know for certain someone is teaching God's truth accurately should come up. The answer is simple,

To the law and to the testimony! If they (those who claim to have the correct belief system) do not speak according to this word, it is because **there is no light in them** (Isa. 8:20; emphasis added).

As the word 'light' is used in scripture to describe God's law and commandments (cf. Ps. 119:105; Prov. 6:23), anyone who teaches that it is no longer necessary to obey God's law now that Christ died for our sins, is a liar,

He who says, 'I know Him (Almighty God),' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1Jn. 2:5; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Many teach such a doctrine today in various religious organizations and these same people will be regarded as the least in the kingdom of God according to what Jesus Christ said,

**Whoever then breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, will be called least in the kingdom of the heavens; but whoever does and teaches them, he will be called great in the kingdom of the heavens** (Mt. 5:19; RNT; emphasis added).

Sadly, many religious leaders from different organizations and faiths teach against the law and commandments of God for various reasons, including genuine ignorance. However, those who follow them need to make sure their leadership is not advocating disobedience to any word that has proceeded from Almighty God,

But he (Christ) answered and said, **'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'** (Mt. 4:4; Ed. note in parenthesis).

As Satan is the grand deceiver (Rev. 12:9), he uses religious organizations to mislead a large percentage of mankind. As most of these same religious organizations pay their ministers, they are able to control what is taught. Paul pointed out that he was not paid

and therefore was free to teach God's truth as he had been instructed through Jesus Christ, not another human religious authority (cf. Gal. 1:11-12),

Did I commit sin in abasing (humbling) myself that you (brethren in Corinth) might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? (2Cor. 11:7; Ed. notes in parentheses).

As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows (I do)! But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore **it is no great thing if his** (Satan's) **ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness**, whose end will be according to their works (2Cor. 11:10-15; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Consequently, Satan's ministers will be the primary force against any teaching that advocates obedience to the law and commandments of Almighty God. This makes it very difficult for those who are not well grounded in God's truth, especially if they are affected by the religious background they came from or the current religious fellowship they are involved with. It is much easier to follow the crowd than question why they are doing the things they are doing. So, "working out your own salvation" in these situations is a great challenge and often a great trial for those who seek to obey God according to scripture (cf. Mt. 10:34-39).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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