

# Key Words in Philippians 05 the Word 'Obedience'

by David Clifford

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*Salvation is a personal appropriation by faith, to be made manifest by good works and made effective by dependence on the indwelling Spirit of God.*

**Duration:** 45:29

**Scripture:** Philippians 2:14

**Topics:** "Christian Obedience", "Spiritual Humility"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher starts by describing a gathering where the ladies sang and danced, expressing their joy and praise to the Lord. However, the atmosphere changed when one woman began backbiting and criticizing, and she was struck by electricity as a consequence. The preacher then shifts the focus to the disciples and their singing, possibly referencing parts of Psalm 113-118. The sermon emphasizes the importance of not only preaching the word of God but also living a balanced and humble life, exemplifying Christ's selflessness. The preacher concludes by highlighting that while salvation is a finished work through Christ's sacrifice, it is also an ongoing process that should be outwardly manifested in our lives.

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## Transcript

Now we are looking at the word obedience this morning, not that it is officially one of the key words of the letter to the Philippians, as the others are officially. I hope we've seen that during the week. But I think it's a very important word in this letter, and it's underlying the whole epistle, obedience.

We see a lot about the obedience of Christ, and we see a lot about the obedience of the Philippians. And underlying it all is the obedience of the Apostle Paul to the will of God, first of all in going to Philippi to preach the gospel. Let us therefore commence our reading this morning at the fourth verse of chapter 2 of Philippians.

It's nice to see a goodly number out again this morning. You must be getting tired, if you're not I am. And I admire your courage putting up with me.

He puts me up, you put up with me for a whole week. Think of that, I admire your grace. The fourth verse of chapter 2, look not every man on his own things or interests, but every man also on the interests of

others.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery, a thing to hang on to, a thing to grasp at, to be equal with God. Simply because he was God. But he made himself of no reputation, that is he emptied himself, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 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.

For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. The Lord bless to us the public reading of Holy Scripture. Work out your own salvation, said the Apostle Paul to the Philippian Christians.

They were Christian people. He had no doubts about this. He led them to Christ.

He led them on with Christ. And he was rejoicing in their faithfulness and constancy in spiritual things, and yet he said to them, work out your own salvation. Now we must, of course, take this in the context in which it is given, to get the real sense and the message from the Lord to our hearts this morning.

And let me start like this. I haven't started yet, that's just by the way. Let me start now.

The entrance fee into God's kingdom is nothing, but the annual subscription is everything. And that's why Paul said, work out your own salvation. Now he said something like this, of course, in Ephesians chapter 2. And in verses 8 and 9 he tells them that the way into the blessing of God's salvation will cost them nothing.

By grace you save through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Never let it be thought that the apostle there is saying that faith is the gift of God. That is a wrong analysis of the two verses.

And it's proved to be a wrong analysis in five ways. And the fifth way is this, that verse 9 would contradict that theory altogether. Because it says, not of works, lest any man should boast.

So faith is not of works. Well that's a ludicrous idea. The whole analysis must be around the subject of salvation.

You are saved by grace. You are saved by God. You are saved, salvation is a gift.

And you are saved not by works, and finally you are saved through faith. That's exactly what the apostle is saying. The word that cannot refer to faith.

It must refer to the first phrase, by grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves. It must do because of the gender. The gender is neuter for that, and the gender for feminine is faith, so that cannot refer to faith.

It refers to salvation. Let me give you the analysis again. It's so important.

This is where hyper-Calvinism brings in an unscriptural idea. And very often many of them start at this verse. Anyway, I'm not supposed to be giving an explanation of this verse, but it comes to my mind, so maybe the Lord has brought it there for somebody's good.

The analysis again is, you are saved by grace, salvation is from God, salvation is a gift, and salvation is not by works, and salvation is through faith. Now I reckon that is the correct analysis. Please disagree with me as much as you wish.

But you see, in the next verse, verse 10, now this is really in connection with my subject this morning. In verse 10 he says, now you people who are saved without doing works must know that God has called you to do works, good works that is. No good works will save you, but once you are saved you must appreciate that you were foreordained to do good works and to glorify God in them.

The doctrine of antinomianism has been the very biggest curse to the people of God in this world for I don't know how long. We are saved by grace, we've got everything from God's grace in Christ that we need for time and for eternity, so that's that, and we're doing nothing about it, and that's unscriptural, and you're on dangerous ground. It's true, potentially we have all in Christ, but the apostle says, the entrance fee is nothing, but the annual subscription is everything, everything.

Because you have been foreordained to do good works, and that's why the apostle says here to them, you've always obeyed, keep on obeying, and obey in this way, work out that salvation that you have, for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Now when he said work out your salvation, let's dismiss the thought forever that he was telling them to get salvation by their works. Far be the thought, or in other words perish the thought, it's not in the idea at all.

They were already saved, and they were being exhorted to work out what they've got in Christ. And so you see, in this, well we'll take these two verses together, the end of verse 12, work out your own salvation within, and verse 13, for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Let me analyse that section in this way.

Are you ready? One, a personal appropriation, your own salvation. Secondly, an outward exhibition, work out your own salvation. And thirdly, an inward realisation, it is God who works in you.

And then fourthly, a defined direction, to will and to do of his good pleasure. In the first idea, your own salvation, we gather this, that we are to make salvation our own by faith. In the second idea, an outward exhibition, we get this idea, we are to make our salvation, that we have manifest by works.

And in the third idea, an inward realisation, we must make our salvation effective by dependence upon the indwelling spirit of God. And fourthly, a defined direction, to will and to do of his good pleasure, we get the idea of making salvation, work out his will by obedience. That's rather a lot to remember, but by a cassette it's easier.

A personal appropriation, your own salvation. He knew very well, I'm going to say jolly well, this. He knew jolly well that this salvation was their own.

He had seen them receive it and appropriate it and by faith with our works possess it. Your own salvation, a personal appropriation. The only way to make God's salvation our own possession is to exercise faith without doing a thing.

Of course, this was Luther's strong point. And this is the idea that turned the world upside down in the Reformation. Justification before God by faith without doing a thing.

He even was so strong upon it that he had very much doubts about the inspiration of the James's epistle. He even doubted that at times. But you see, we must appreciate that these two brethren, Paul and James, were not contradicting one another.

Paul was talking about being just before God by simple faith in the work of Christ without our works at all. Whereas James was saying, now if you say you have justification before God without any works at all of yours, then you must show good works to prove that you've got the real thing. Just before God by faith, just before men by works.

Just by the works of faith and just by faith that works. So they were not contradicting one another. As a matter of fact, we've already seen from Ephesians 2, 8 and 9 that this is the apostle Paul's doctrine as well.

The entrance into God's kingdom, the entrance fee is nothing, but the annual subscription is everything. And so Luther was standing there before the Diet of Worms. I was standing on the spot myself some months ago by the side of the River Rhine there.

It is the Rhine, isn't it? And I was standing on the spot. There was a plaque there in a brass plate, you know, it says, here Luther stood and he gave the date. And I've forgotten a date.

My memory is the thing I forget with. I stood on the spot where Luther stood. And this is what he said, here do I stand.

He was standing before the Diet of Worms. That wasn't a kind of health dish, you know, a sort of slimming meal. Oh no.

It was the council of the City of Worms. He said, here do I stand at this geographical spot. He was talking about standing on the word of God and the fact that justification is by faith alone without doing a thing.

And he said, I can do no other. And if ever we get salvation, and I know we possess it today, it is because we did nothing but rested on the cross of Calvary when he died there and then rose again the third day. Now it is your own salvation.

Of course it is God's salvation. He thought it. It is Christ's salvation.

He bought it. And it's the Holy Spirit's salvation. He wrought it.

But it's your salvation. You sought it. If you sought it by faith.

Well, it was God's plan for God so loved the world. He made it. And Christ, the price, he paid it.

And the power of the Spirit made it. But you have it and possess it if by faith you have received it. Of course faith must always have a worthy object.

It isn't faith in the abstract that saves anybody. Or faith in anything that will get you anywhere. I mean to say, faith in the abstract will get you nowhere.

You must have faith in something. Now if you go to the city this afternoon in the bus, you will have faith in the bus driver and you will have faith in the bus that the wheels go around and the engine works and so on. And to get there you must exercise faith in something.

Faith in the abstract is no good. Faith must always have a worthy object. And it's the object of faith that counts every time.

And if I'm going to get eternal salvation through faith, the object of my faith must be for one eternal Saviour. Now let me say this, that Christ is, as you know, God's salvation for you and me. The old man Simeon took him up in his arms and said, mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

Absolutely right. Because the Lord Jesus confirmed this later on when he said to Zacchaeus, I must abide at thy house today. And when he got there he said, today is salvation come to thy house.

He is God's salvation for you and for me. Therefore if you have made this salvation yours by faith, then Christ is your greatest possession. Christ for me is the greatest possession of my life.

Let others boast of heaps of gold, Christ for me. His riches never can be told, Christ for me. Your gold will waste and wear away.

Your honours perish in a day. My portion never can decay. Christ for me.

He is my prophet, priest and king. He did for me salvation bring. And while I breath I mean to sing, Christ for me.

All right. Christ is the salvation of God. It is a personal appropriation for every one of us.

And we make him ours and we make it ours by faith without works. Your own salvation. That's point number one.

Now secondly, an outward exhibition. And this is the main idea. He says, now you've always obeyed.

When I first came to Philippi, you listened to the word of God and there was the obedience of faith manifested even to the saving of your souls. And since I've been away from you, you have been obeying the impulses of the Spirit in your hearts and the leading of the Spirit in your assembly. And you've gone on and on and on.

And they had remembered to do through the years what other assemblies had forgotten to do, to have fellowship with the great apostle in his ministry of the gospel here and there. You have always obeyed, he said. Now obey in this thing as well.

Work out your own salvation. There must be, he says, a continuous evidence that you have salvation. And this is what James was concerned about.

He was concerned about people in the assembly who said they were saved and they were no different from anybody else in the world. That's what James was worried about. And the apostle Paul was worried about that as well.

He wanted everybody to work out this salvation, that there should be some evidence of what they had. Now I saw my new grandson the other day, and there was evidence, plenty of evidence, that he was really

possessing life. He had new life.

Why, he howled and he squawked and he wept and cried and almost yelled at a few weeks old. And he kicked and I don't know what he didn't do. There was every evidence of life.

And we must expect in our young men and women in our assemblies, real genuine spiritual evidence of a spiritual life. And if it's not there, don't accept their testimony that they're saved. I know some Christian people, they say, these young people of ours now, oh they're born again but they're not very interested sometimes.

Oh but they're born again and you know sometimes they come on a Sunday morning, it's true they come to please us. They don't love the Lord, they don't serve the Lord, they do everything the world does, but they're born again you know. When they were seven they trusted the Saviour.

Rubbish! If there's new life, it will find vengeance. If I've got the life of Christ in my soul, there's going to be an evidence of the life of Christ. Don't believe it! There's no evidence.

By their fruits ye shall know them. Work out your salvation, make it manifest by good works. And this is what God is expecting from us.

We are foreordained to good works. Now in the context there, he tells them how to work it out. Did you notice that? I don't think we read that verse, I'm sorry.

We should have read verses 14 and 15 which says, Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. That's the first way. And secondly, holding forth the word of life.

Now he's given us a balanced way in which we can work out our salvation. In your life, shine. Be good in your life for the glory of God.

And in your witness, preach not your own philosophy, but the word of life. Holding forth the word of life. Now it's not enough just to live the life.

It is not enough just to preach the word. The balance is essential. We get so Insymmetrical.

That's the right word. We get unbalanced. We major on one thing and forget the other.

The Lord Jesus said, This you should have done, yes, but you should have not have left the other undone. It is you should shine in your life and witness to the word of God with your lips. You see, we as believers are both Christ's prose and God's poem.

In that verse I've been quoting in Ephesians 2.10, the Greek word is poema, which means, well from which we get our English word It's translated handiwork or workmanship. Could be translated literally, we are God's poem. And it says also in Corinthians that we are Christ's.

You are living epistles, living prose, read and known of all men. Put the two together, you get the balanced Christian life, working out the salvation that you had in Christ in a balanced way. Some people are good at the poems, bad at the prose.

Some are good at the prose and bad at the poem. You think of Millium, she got the ladies together and they started singing and dancing and they had a lovely time of community singing and they sang unto the Lord and said, Sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he flown into the sea. And she started backbiting and criticising and she was smitten with leprosy at the tent door because of it.

Very good at the poems, bad at the prose, just like the disciples. I'm not going to continue with this, it's a separate letter to read. But the disciples you know, they sang a hymn.

They sang I suppose parts of Psalm 113, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 118. They sang a hymn, good at the poems. And they went out and fought.

So you go on all the way through the scripture like that. And the exhortation is to do it in a balanced way, shine in your life and a witness to the word of God in your testimony. An outward exhibition, make salvation manifest by work.

Now you see salvation is a finished work, you know that. That salvation is an unfinished process. God finished salvation for us at the cross through Christ.

But it's a process in our lives which has to be worked out to the glory of God day by day. Salvation is an inward blessing, we all know that. But salvation is an outward working, and we should all show that.

It must be manifest. And you notice what it says in the context here, uh, work out your own salvation with fear and with trembling. How carefully we must do this, working out our salvation with fear, lest by any word or act of yours, you spoil or thwart or put back God's work in your life and God's work through your life with fear and trembling.

How easy it is for me to grieve the Holy Spirit. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Now your salvation of course is your greatest possession.

Not your house or your boat or your car, but your possession of the Holy Spirit of Jesus. And He is to be manifested through our lives, and no man can but by the Holy Ghost. And that brings us to idea number three.

An inward realization. I thank God He didn't stop at the end of verse twelve. An inward realization, an inward secret of the exhortation He's giving to us, and how we can fulfill it.

It is God who works in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure. So we make salvation effective by dependence upon the indwelling Spirit of God. You know that the Spirit of God that indwells every believer is both the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

There are not two Holy Spirits, you know. There's only one. The Lord Jesus said in speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit, If any man love me, my Father will love him, and I will love him, and we will come, the two of us, we will come and make our abode with him.

And He was talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit. So we will come, the Father and the Son comes to us when we are converted, and indwells our hearts. He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

This is what the Apostle says here. That Spirit of God, that Spirit of Christ is the secret for you, so that you can not in your own strength and fleshly energy work out your salvation. The arm of flesh will fail you.

You dare not trust your own. But by the Spirit of God, thank God our need is met. We can, we can, we can, because He can through us, and He is the Almighty One.

I am master of every situation in Christ who makes me strong, and through the Spirit of Christ who indwells my life. So we are God's handiwork, because it is God who is working through us. The doing, the working, is by Him.

We read of Barnabas who was a good man. He did good things. And he gives us the secret.

In the same section it says, Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and faith. Now he was good because he was full of the Holy Ghost. He found a place in his heart and life for the Holy Spirit to control him completely.

That's why he was good. No man can but by the Holy Ghost. It is God who works within you by the Holy Spirit.

And of course he was full of faith, because that's what he needed at the time, because he was filled with the Holy Spirit. And the result was he was a good man. Talking about Luther again, Luther's maxim was this, you don't become righteous by doing what is righteous, but having become righteous in his righteousness would begin to do what is righteous.

Now that's not a conundrum. Let's use the word good. It means the same.

You don't become good by doing what is good, but having become good in his goodness, you begin to do good. By his indwelling presence that is. The almightiness, the power, the working, the doing is the Lord.

It is God who works within you. Paul says, his working works in me mightily. Well if his working works in me, it must work in me mightily, because he is the Almighty One.

So the thing to do is to acknowledge the person within, to depend upon the person within, and to obey the person within. Now since you've got a good record you Philippians, you've really always obeyed him as far as I know. Keep it up, obey him, let him work through you, and when God's Spirit is wanting to work through you, let him have his way.

Acknowledge his presence within. Never hinder his working through unbelief. Never hinder his working by criticism, or scandal, or evil speaking.

Let him work on in you as well. And then finally, a defined direction, to will and to do of his good pleasure. Shall I give you the whole verse again? Work out your own salvation, for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

And if the first idea of your own salvation is, make salvation yours by faith. And the second idea is, make salvation manifest by works, work it out. And the third idea is, make salvation effective by obedience and dependence upon the indwelling Spirit.

Now this idea must be, make salvation work out his will, by obedience to him at every turn of the corner. Now we have seen the obedience of Christ in this passage. What a wonderful example of obedience we have here.

It says he became obedient unto death. It says he became the servant of Jehovah. He took upon himself the form of a servant.

And he behoves a servant to be obedient. And so it was, he was obedient unto death. Now have you ever thought about that? Death, for you and for me, apart from the coming of Christ, death is a necessity for all mankind, except one.

And for the Lord Jesus, death was not necessity. He did no sin. Death comes by sin.

For him, death was an obedience. And he said, I am come to do thy will, O my God. And that was to die, not to live, thank God for his life.

Not to teach, thank God for his teachings. But to die, and to give his life a ransom for many. He was the only man for whom death was an obedience.

Thank God he was willing to do the will of God and go all the way to the cross of Calvary, having you in his mind and me in his mind. You have always obeyed. He, the Lord Jesus, was obeyed.

Now keep it up. And when the Spirit within you, the Spirit of God who wants to work out this salvation through you, not only giving evidence that you are born of God, but bringing blessing to people, God's heavenly, divine, spiritual blessings to those who are in need of them through you, then let the Holy Spirit have his way and obey him, so that the will of God will be performed through you. And that's the very, very best for every one of us.

And when God works in you to confess, I have an apology to make today. My memories let me down. I have two bookings for tonight.

So I, the Holy Spirit tells me I must confess my error and ask forgiveness. When the Holy Spirit of God works in you to confess, then confess. When the Holy Spirit works in you to witness, then witness.

When the Holy Spirit of God works in you to repent, then repent. When God's Holy Spirit works in you to apologize, then apologize. When God's Holy Spirit says to you that you must make restitution, then you must obey and make restitution.

Notice what it says. God works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure. God gives the desire to will.

God gives the power to do. And God gives the direction according to his will and according to his good pleasure. And that must always be so.

When God works through us, we obey his working. It was through the obedience of faith that Moses and Aaron and the children of Israel eventually found themselves on the other side of the Red Sea and eventually at Eden. No, not Eden.

Elim, resting in their God by the waters beneath the palm trees and by the springs of satisfying water. You see, it began like this. Moses said, let my people go.

And Pharaoh said, you want to go, you can go and worship. But he said, worship God in the land. Moses said, no, we must obey God.

God has sent three days journey in the wilderness. They were driven out and came back. And Pharaoh said, didn't you want to go and worship the Lord? Yes, Moses and Aaron said, that's just what we want to do.

All right, he said, go and worship the Lord. But he said, don't go very far away, stop on the borderland. Moses said, no, we will obey God.

And God sent three days journey into the wilderness. Moses and Aaron came back after a while, a few plagues and things. And Pharaoh said, see, let's see, didn't you want to go and worship the Lord, your God, in the wilderness? They said, that's exactly what we want to do.

God has commanded us and we must obey. He said, all right then. He said, you go and worship the Lord.

You need to stop in the land, you need to stop on the borderland. You can go three days journey into the wilderness to worship the Lord, your God. Then he said, but half a minute, he said, now who's going? Well, he said, we're all going, our wives and our little ones with the men.

Moses said, oh no, said Pharaoh. You menfolk wanted to go, and that was a lie. God wanted to deliver them completely.

And Moses said, no, we will not accept that compromise. We will obey God, and it's going to be a complete deliverance. And we're going with our wives and our little ones.

And then they were brought in again, after a while, and a bit more plague and tribulation. He said, let me see, didn't you want to go and worship the Lord in the wilderness? Right out in the wilderness with your wives and your little ones. Exactly right, said Moses.

But he said, listen, he said, well that's all right. But he said, of course you won't take your flocks and your herds with you, will you? You'll leave them in Egypt, won't you? You'll leave your business here. He said, no we won't.

We're going to obey God completely, and take with us our business as well as our families in the will and way of God. But does obedience pay? A thousand times. And after the firstborn were slain, they were brought into Pharaoh's presence again.

And this is what Pharaoh said, and he said it twice over. He repeated himself, and it wasn't their repetition. He said, go and serve the Lord as ye have said.

As ye have said. They had it all their own way, because their way was God's way. And when our way is God's way, God is the almighty one who will see us through to victory.

And they got over the Red Sea. Mind you when they got to the Red Sea there was a problem. Speak unto the children of Israel.

Oh, first of all it was stand still. And that was hard to do with their enemies around them. But they obeyed in faith.

And they saw the salvation of the Lord. And the next command was hardest of all. Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.

And the next step took them into the Red Sea. And they obeyed in faith. And they didn't get into the Red Sea because God opened up their way.

And the God that lived in Moses' time is just the same today. And for those who obeyed by faith, he will certainly open up their way. And he will work out his full salvation through them day by day.

And Miriam and the girls, they got together and sang and said, the Lord hath triumphed gloriously. If it had been left to them they would have failed miserably. But by the obedience of faith they left it to him.

And he triumphed gloriously. And they entered into his glorious triumph. That's the way of blessing for me and blessing through me to others.

Brothers and sisters, what a great salvation you have. It's your own. It is the person of Christ himself.

Work it out, not in the flesh, but by the indwelling Spirit of God. And then his will, as you obey, will be performed. Lord, lead us on, and on with thee, depending not upon ourselves, but upon the enabling and the almightiness of thy gracious indwelling Spirit.

Teach us not only to trust, but to obey. And see thy perfect will being worked through us, by thy perfect servant, the gracious Holy Spirit. We pray this giving thee our thanks for thy word, in the Saviour's precious name.

Amen.

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