

Synergism is based on monergism. That is the theological take-away from our passage this morning, but in some ways sums up the theology of the whole Bible. What in the world does it mean. A large part of education is merely the expanding of vocabulary so let's start with some education. Synergism means working together: *sun* – with, *ergon* work – to work together, *synergy*. *Mono* – alone, *ergon* – work – to work alone: monergism (great website). Is salvation God's work alone or our work together.

When it comes to the Christian life, as with most things in life, as Chesterton said, "there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands." Luther said we are too often like a drunk trying to mount a horse. We try to get on and then fall off the other side, then try again and fall off the other side. On and on.

There are two extremes to avoid: legalism and passivity. Legalism says it all depends on us. We must work to gain God's favor. On the other side of the horse is passivity: we do nothing and God does everything. Well, we want to land in the biblical middle. Remember that Packer quote that Bobby shared a couple weeks ago? Not let go and let God but trust God and get going. Not mere monergism or mere synergism but a synergism that is based on monergism. We work because God works. **Phil 2:12-13 (922) This is the Word.** / 12 Ways to Work from these two verses:

I. *Beloved*, work – Paul says therefore my beloved. These people are already loved. They are part of the church. They are God's people. This is the grammar of the gospel. Grace then demand. We are called not to work for our salvation, but to work out our salvation. We are not called to gain God's love but to live in light of God's love. **Eph 4:32-5:2**. To use grammatical terminology, the indicative grounds the imperative. The indicative mood states a fact. The dog is in the house. Statement of fact. The imperative mood states a command, what ought to be: Put the dog outside. The imperative (what we should do) is based upon the indicative (what God did for us in Christ).

II. Keep obeying. "As you have always obeyed, in my presence and in my absence." The word for "obey" is closely related to the verb "to hear." You can hear the similarity: obey is *hypakouo* and hear is *akouo*. Obeying and listening go together. We could call it applied hearing, an obedient listening. / Footnote on the importance of hearing the Word. You know we love that this room is filled with children – we would have it no other way - but let's also do our best to keep from distracting others during corporate worship. As best we can, especially during the reading and preaching of the Word, try to keep your crew quiet and in their seat, so that we don't distract from the crucial task of hearing the Word.

The Philippians are new believers and they are obeying God, even when the Apostle is gone. You know the tendency. Children at times are tempted to slack off when Mom's not around. Or lazy employees when the boss is gone. I worked on a ranch in H.S. and didn't know the Lord so now is as good a time as any to confess that there were times I took brief naps in the back of the property. I would bust it for 3-4 hours then prop my feet up for half an hour. We closely follow the speed limit when behind a highway patrolman.

Obedience without the presence of authority is a sign of a transformed heart. With no one watching besides the Lord. And friends, whether or not Paul was present, or whether or not your parents, or boss, or spouse is present, the Lord sees. God is always present.

III. *Work* out your salvation. We are to work. Labor. Put forth effort. Sanctified sweat. Present tense: keep working. This is for all of us. This verb for "work out" was often used of the cultivation of farm land. Just as a gardener must cultivate the seed by watering, laying down fertilizer, de-weeding so the plant can grow, so

believers must cultivate the gospel seed planted in the heart. How? The ordinary means of grace that God has given us. Will say more about those at the end.

Protestants are not opposed to works. It is just vital to get them on the right side of the equation. We are called to work, but as Lewis put it, we work in a new worry-free way. Remember what Dallas Willard said: grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Eph 2:8-10: we are not saved by works but for works. / This call to work out our salvation is another way of saying what he said back in **1:27**. / We work out our salvation. No one drifts into holiness.

IV. Work out your salvation *because* Jesus is Lord. Verse 12 starts with “therefore.” That points back to verse **10-11**. Therefore, work out your salvation. The only logical response to the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ is to submit to his Lordship in all areas of life. “All of life for Christ.”

V. Work out *y’all’s* salvation. “Your” is plural. So is the verb for work out. As we’ve said, Paul is concerned with our corporate life. Our salvation is to be worked out with one another in the local church. Friends, this is why we do membership and discipline the way we do. This is a call for meaningful membership. **Eph 4:11-16**. We work out our salvation together. We help each other persevere and finish well.

VI. Work out your *own* salvation. This call is corporate as well as individual. This command is to all of us and to each of us. It is not enough to come to church. Just like sitting in a garage doesn’t make you a car, pew-sitting doesn’t make one a Christian. It is not enough to hang around Christians. It is not enough to have a Christian family. Kids, look up here. You are so blessed to have parents who bring you to church and lead you in family worship. But listen, *you* must trust Christ. You must make your faith your own. You must pursue him. You must have a relationship with God. You cannot rely on the faith of your parents. Work out your own salvation.

VII. Work out your salvation *with fear and trembling*. God is holy. He is to be revered. He is to be feared. The fear of God means the fear of displeasing God. It is this foundational desire to honor God in all of life. Charles Bridges says the fear of the Lord is “that affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father’s law.”

We should dread offending God. In Lewis’ book, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, the children are at the Beaver’s house. Mr. and Mrs. Beaver are going to take the children to see the king, Aslan. Lucy asks if he is a man? “Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. “Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion, the Lion, the great Lion.” “Ooh,” said Susan, “I thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” “That you will, dearie, and make no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver; “if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly.” “Then he isn't safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver; “don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king I tell you.” We are to work out our salvation with reverent fear before our great and holy King.

Paul is likely alluding to Ps 2, which Cooper read. Ps 2 is about the coming King who will inherit the nations as his inheritance. Ps 2:11 “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

VIII. Work out your own salvation *because* God works – **12-13**. Notice that it doesn't say work out your salvation and God works in you. It says *for*. These little connecting words matter. This is a grounding. *Because* God is working in you, work out your salvation. This is not strict cooperation. That would be we work and God works. This is not we do our part and God does his part. No, we do our part *for, because* God does his part. Work! For God works. God's work enables our part. God always takes the first step. He is always initiator. **1:6**

Btw, this is why we begin our service with a CTW. Liturgy is our order of service. It means the work of the people. *Leitourgia* laōs for people and ergon for work. Our work - *liturgy* is always a response to God's work. 1 Cor 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." Prov 21:31: "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD." In Col, Paul is talking about his ministry of helping people mature in the faith in 1.29: "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Work out your salvation for God is at work. Without v. 13, this is a terrifying command, indeed another religion. But in the Gospel, behind every demand is a divine donation. What God prescribes he provides. What God asks he provides. Behind every imperative lurks a gracious indicative. We can only work out what God has worked in.

IX. Work because God works *in* you. When you trust in Christ, you are endowed with the twin gifts of grace the New Covenant brings: full and final forgiveness of sins and the gift of the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit is not mentioned here, but this same verb for "work" is often attributed to the Spirit (1 Cor 12:6, 11, Eph 3:20). God the Father is at work in us through the Spirit to conform us to the Son.

X. Work because God is at work in you *to will*. This is the internal dimension. He is at work at the will level, the motive level, the desire level. He is changing your "want to." Through the NC, the Spirit changes us from the inside out. Ezek 36: our great God removes the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh. He works in us to will.

XI. Work because God is at work in you *to work*. This is the external dimension. The Spirit is at work to change the inner person and the outer person. He starts at the heart then moves to the hands. The Spirit gives the desire and power to obey. And the kind of obedience the Lord wants is not mere externalism, but external acts from a transformed heart. Remember how Isaiah and Jesus rebuked the religious leaders: you honor me with your lips but your heart is far from me. He wants all of you, inside and out.

XII. This is all for God's good pleasure: His delight. His joy. Our obedience brings him glory and thus brings him pleasure. It delights God to be the delight of his people. God's happiness is the goal of salvation. 1 Tim 1:11 speaks of the glory of the blessed God. That word "blessed" just means happy. The happy God. Heb 12:3 says God the Son endured the cross for the joy that was set before him. In all this, God gets the glory. Augustine said "Our rewards in heaven are a result of God's crowning His own gifts."

Work because God works. So let's end by asking what does it mean practically to work out our own salvation? How can we do that? Or we could ask, how does God work in us? Is there anything we can do? Yes. Through the ordinary means of grace. The means God has given us to grow in grace. And they are ordinary. The secret sauce of sanctification is the slow and steady means of grace. Let me just remind you of the main three: Word, Prayer, Church.

Word – Read the Word, memorize the Word, meditate on the Word, hear the Word taught and preached. If you are not serving, come to S.S. The Spirit works through the Word. 1 Thess 2:13: “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

Prayer – God talks to us through the Word and we talk to God through prayer.

Church - By church I mean both corporate worship as well as discipling one another in the church. God shapes us through corporate worship, as we gather, are called to worship, hear the Word, sing the Word, pray the Word, take the supper together. Our souls are imperceptibly shaped by the liturgy on Sundays.

And meaningful membership means we are urging one another toward godliness. Word prayer church. That’s the path. J.C. Ryle: “Tell me what a man does in the matter of Bible reading and praying, in the matter of Sunday, public worship, and the Lord’s supper, and I will soon tell you what he is, and on which road he is travelling.”¹

There is no microwave holiness. Ryle speaks of the error of thinking that most people cannot attain holiness. As if it is some special gift only bestowed upon a few. The masses may admire it, but only from a distance as it is out of reach for most. He says:

“Now I believe that this is a most dangerous mistake. I believe that spiritual, as well as natural, greatness depends far more on the use of means within everybody’s reach, than on anything else. Of course, I do not say we have a right to expect a miraculous grant of intellectual gifts. But this I do say, that when a man is once converted to God, whether he shall be eminently holy or not depends chiefly on his own diligence in the use of God’s appointed means.”² Our God is a God of means. He uses the means of grace, the habits that he has given his children to grow in grace.

These are ordinary not spectacular, not fast, not momentous, not the next big thing. We are infatuated with novelty and dismiss the same ole thing. Screwtape to Wormwood: “Work on their horror of the Same Old Thing. The horror of the Same Old thing is one of the most valuable passions we have produced in the human heart – an endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconstancy in friendship.”³ He says this demand for absolute novelty is “entirely our workmanship.”

We work out what God has worked in by the consistent, habitual practice of the ordinary means of grace God has given us over the long haul. It takes a lifetime. Faithfulness day by day. Order your life around habits conducive to spiritual growth. Work. *For* God works.

Benediction: Now may the Lord of glory, the God of all grace work in you that you might work for him for his good pleasure.

¹ *Practical Religion*, 13.

² *Ibid.*, 71.

³ *Screwtape*, 257.