

Someone may have told you somewhere along your life's journey to, "Let go and let God!" You may have also have been at the receiving end of the Scripture that says, "Wait on the Lord..."

We heard these religious platitudes and clichés that tell that it is "all God and none of us." But in the passage of Scripture we are about to look at, Paul gives us a balanced view of the salvation God gives to the believing sinner.

Phil 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you 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;

Because Jesus is Lord (Master) the Christian is compelled to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Please know that the statement, "Work out your own salvation" means to "work out," not to "work for" your salvation.

A "works salvation" is not being taught here. Paul is not teaching the believer to work for his or her salvation—most people, who know little of nothing of the Christian faith hold to the view that you must work for your salvation. There are some religious groups that believe you must work to obtain eternal favor with God.

If you've ever shared the Gospel with someone there is a high probability that you've run into someone who thinks that if they try to be a good person, or is a faithful church member or gives money to help people or goes through some kind of spiritual ritual like baptism or confirmation...that they are fit for heaven.

They try to work *for* salvation, saving up points with God, hoping that when they face God, He will take out His "heavenly calculator" and do the math. Like those who, when I was a child, would save their S&H Green Stamps and cash them in for prizes; they think if they work hard enough, they will "win" heaven as their prize.

The Bible teaches otherwise...

Rom 4:4-5 Now to the one who works (for salvation), his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,

When Paul writes, "work out your own salvation", the idea is to progress to the finish or completion in spiritual growth and maturity. This process is what the Bible calls "sanctification." Sanctification is when the person is set apart *by* and *for* God into good works.

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in

The Christian is not saved by good works; he or she is saved in order to *perform* good works.

Phil 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you 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;

When Paul was at Philippi, the believers were working out their own salvation—they realized that God had set them apart for good deeds and they were doing the good deeds.

I imagine they were reaching out to their community with the Gospel—doing good works that earned them the opportunity to tell people about Jesus and His love.

But now Paul is in prison for preaching the Gospel and something happens when the leader is away so Paul says, “*as you 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.*”

Now don't make the mistake of thinking that Paul was saying at the end of verse 12 that they were to work because they feared him. No, they were to work out their own salvation out of a fear of God.

In Colossians chapter 3 Paul spells out exactly what he means: “*Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*” (vs. 22-24)

So Paul says, “*work out your own salvation...*” The Christian is to work as a response of being saved by God's loving, marvelous, matchless grace! It is not a passive work Paul describes: “*Let go and let God!*” or “*I'm gonna wait on the Lord!*” Paul is letting us know in Philippians 1:12 that we are to be active in this process.

It is like driving a car with a navigation system. You can have a car, filled with gas but if you do not turn the key (or in some of our modern vehicles—press a button or speak) the car will be no good to you.

Once you get it started, you need to press on the gas. You need the GPS to direct you to your destination.

God is like the gas in a car; He is also the navigation system—giving the driver direction. God has ordained that both you and He work together to accomplish His will. This is what Paul is saying in verse 13:

Phil 2:12b-13 – “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

When it comes to salvation, verse 13 reminds us again that the entire salvation process is the work of a sovereign God and the result of His grace but He gives the Christian the opportunity (vs. 12) to work out of that salvation.

He gives us the car, the key, the gas and the navigation system and then says to us, “*Now drive it to my glory! Go and spread the Gospel beginning in your locality and fan out even to the remotest parts of this earth.*”

Paul continues in our text with verse 14: “*Do all things without complaining and disputing...*”

It appears that Paul is still addressing some of the problems of discord and strife that were going on in the Philippian church. Obviously, people were complaining and disputing.

It could have been the kind of complaining that was uttered by Martha against her sister Mary. Remember in Luke chapter 10 when Jesus paid a visit to the home of these two sisters. Martha went into the kitchen and began to fix a meal “fit for a King” but Mary was in the front room sitting and talking with Jesus—or rather listening to the words coming from the lips of the Master Teacher.

Martha got all bent out of shape and complained to Jesus because her sister wasn’t helping in the kitchen—Paul may have been referring to this kind of complaining.

The complainer thinks the world revolves around him. When her agenda isn’t followed or when one’s perceived needs are going unmet, out comes the complaints.

The complainer is a whiner who self-righteously blames and accuses others. They are irritating, irksome, and very exhausting. Complainers manage to find fault and gripe about everything. They point out real problems but they do it in a manner that tick people off or force people to become defensive.

The complainer feels powerless when it comes to managing his own life but always know how things "ought to be" or "should be" but avoids getting involved himself, wishing that "someone" would correct all the problems.

The Israelites in the Old Testament complained time after time against God and Moses. The Scripture tells us that God hates complaining (Exodus 32:9-10). He is displeased when we, like Israel, lack faith, doubt His power, question His ability or willingness to provide, and we hesitate to rest in His love.

When the children of Israel were captive slaves of Egypt the Bible says that they *murmured*. When they were wanderers in the wilderness headed for the Promised Land, they murmured.

The word “murmur,” “grumble” in Philippians 2 refers not to a loud outspoken dissatisfaction, but to that *undertone murmuring*, a dissatisfaction against men, not God. It is used of those who confer *secretly*.

It could be an individual or clique who secretly confers together to talk about someone, a ministry, or even the pastor. Eventually the secret murmuring turns into outright dissension or rebellion.

Paul not only encouraged the Philippian believers to “*Do all things without complaining...*” He exhorted them to do all things without... *disputing...*”

The word translated “disputing” means “the thinking of a man deliberating within himself.” It implies an inward arguing, doubting, a hesitating or suspicion.

In the church this is the person who deliberates within himself about what’s going on in the church. This person has issues with someone and internalizes them rather than talks about them to the person.

Jesus says in Matthew 18:15 that when your brother or sister sins against you, you need to talk to them about it in private—putting the issue on the table so that you and your brother can resolve it among yourselves without getting others involved.

Disputing not only has to do with individuals who deliberate within themselves, it can also include groups of people who argue among themselves or are doubtful or suspicious about a person, a ministry or a church leader. Rather than going to the person with whom they have the issue, they discuss it among themselves.

Let me tell you that the Lord takes serious the complaining and disputing that goes on in His church, especially when it is against the leadership.

Jude 1:11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Remember that name: *Korah*, we will see the significance of this name very soon.

Jude 1:12 These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;

Jude 1:13 raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

Jude 1:14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints,

Jude 1:15 "to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

Jude 1:16 These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.

Notice in verse 16 the same words used in Philippians chapter two: "*These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.*"

Who is Jude writing about in verse 16? He is writing about men like Korah, mentioned in verse 11. Jude is referring to an incident that concerned Korah that is recorded in the Old Testament book of Numbers, chapter 16:

Num 16:1 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men;

Korah was a son of Levi, one of Jacob's sons designated by God to minister in and around the tabernacle—the tent that contained the Ark of the Covenant when God met the Children of Israel.

Some of the Levi's were purified and were assigned the task of taking care of the tabernacle. Others were consecrated and were assigned the priestly task of performing the sacrifice and associated responsibilities.

Num 16:2 and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown.

Num 16:3 They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

A rather large group of Levites led by Korah rose up against Moses and Aaron because they could speak to God and lead the children of Israel and perform the sacrifice but all Korah and the other could do was put up and take down the tabernacle tent.

Korah says in verse 3, *“You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?”*

Korah was saying, “We are all set apart by God” (a true statement) and “the Lord is with everyone one of us (another true statement). While both of these are true statements, God doesn't call everyone to lead.

You see, *God* had called Moses and Aaron to lead the children of Israel so when Korah led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron, he was actually leading a rebellion against God.

Num 16:4 So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face;

Num 16:5 and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him.

Num 16:6 "Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company;

Num 16:7 "put fire in them and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the LORD chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

Num 16:8 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi:

Num 16:9 "Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them;

Num 16:10 "and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?"

Moses was trying to reason with Korah and the rest—letting them know that God did call them to something great—to do the work of taking care of the tabernacle when He would meet with His people! Not only was it a privilege to serve God in this way, they were also a blessing to the people of God.

If Moses was among us today at GraceWay Church he would say the same kind of thing to us. There are some of us that are doing what is considered menial labor—some of us are doing things behind the scenes and hardly anyone knows about it and you rarely if at anytime get the recognition.

Moses would say to you, *“Is it a small thing to you that the God of all Grace has separated you from the congregation of GraceWay Church, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of taking care of the church of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them?”*

No it's not a small thing; it is a great thing *the Lord* has called you to! Thus Moses tells Korah in verse 11:

Num 16:11 "Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?"

Verse 12 to 15 is a sidebar conversation that Moses has with another rebel and because of time, we need to press on to verse 16:

Num 16:16 And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the LORD; you and they, as well as Aaron.

*Num 16:17 "Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each with his censer."
Num 16:18 So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron.*

What's going on here is that Moses is suggesting a test not unlike the one Elijah had with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18.

*Num 16:19 And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.
Num 16:20 And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,
Num 16:21 "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."*

The prideful Korah accepted the test and gathered all those who sided with him against Moses and Aaron right in front of God's house. And, God shows up!

Notice who God speaks to: Moses and Aaron, His called and appointed leaders over His people.

Let me stop here and let you know that it doesn't work this way in the church. Each one of us who have been saved by the Blood of Christ have been made *kings and priests to God the Father* (Rev. 1:4-6)

We no longer need someone to intercede for us before God as Moses did for the Children of Israel—we can go to God on our own but through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

However, God has called men to serve as pastors over His flock.

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

In the New Testament church God has called His people to submit to those who are their elders and pastors:

Heb 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

While we all can go before God if we go clothed in the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ, God has an order in the church that needs to be observed and the sheep must submit to the undershepherds so long as the undershepherds are submitting to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus the Christ:

Heb 13:7 Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul tells Timothy, a young pastor to, "be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 the Apostle Paul says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Back in Numbers 16, God tells Moses and Aaron that He is going to take these rebels out. Notice Moses and Aaron's response:

Num 16:22 Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"

Num 16:23 So the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:24 "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'"

Moses and Aaron interceded for the Children of Israel; they beg God to reconsider what He is about to do. Then God tells Moses to speak to the congregation and tell them to get as far away as possible from the tents of the insurrectionists. Moses obeys.

Num 16:25 Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him.

Num 16:26 And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins."

Num 16:27 So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.

Num 16:28 And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will.

Num 16:29 "If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me.

Num 16:30 "But if the LORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LORD."

Num 16:31 Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them,

Num 16:32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods.

Num 16:33 So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.

Num 16:34 Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!"

Num 16:35 And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

Num 16:36 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Num 16:37 "Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away.

Num 16:38 "The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the LORD, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel."

Num 16:39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar,

Num 16:40 to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the LORD, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the LORD had said to him through Moses.

The complaining doesn't cease...

Num 16:41 On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD."

Num 16:42 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.

Num 16:43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting.

Num 16:44 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 16:45 "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces.

Num 16:46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun."

Num 16:47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people.

Num 16:48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.

Num 16:49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident.

Num 16:50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

Let me shed some light on something, if you haven't already seen it. Aaron, the High Priest, interceded for the Children of Israel. They were a stiff-necked lot; they were a bunch of complainers who disputed with authority; they were sinners—who saw the miracles of God as He delivered them from Egyptian bondage.

They had caused judgment plague to fall upon themselves because of their sin and rebellion yet the Bible says that Aaron, the High Priest, "*stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.*"

In my imagination I see the plague rolling through the congregation of the Children of Israel and when it gets to Aaron, who is holding the fire from the altar and the incense, death abruptly stops! All the people that were on the other side of Aaron were delivered from death.

There has come One who has a priesthood that is mightier than Aaron's.

There has come One who has a priesthood that is forever.

There has come One who has interceded for us and even today stands between the dead and the living...

When the judgment was poured out upon the Children of Israel because of their sin, they were helpless—they couldn't do anything but accept the judgment that was coming because of their rebellion against a holy God.

The Bible says that when Christ came into the world we were helpless; we were without strength. There was nothing we could do for ourselves that would bring us back into the favor of God.

Rom 5:6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Rom 5:7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.

Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Moses tells Aaron to run for the tabernacle, take a censer and put fire from the altar and use this holy fire to light the incense and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them.

Now when Moses and Aaron talked with Pharaoh in Egypt, Moses was 80 years old and Aaron was 83. Aaron dies at 123 years old so when he was running to make atonement for the sin of the Children of Israel he was between 83 and 123 years old!

The point of the matter is when Aaron gets to the congregation, the plague of death stops in its tracks! When death sees Jesus, it has to stop.

The death plague is no match for Jesus thus the Apostle Paul says, *"Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"
(1 Cor 15:54b – 57)

Paul says, *"Do all things without complaining and disputing..."* Why? Because it displeases God?

We've just seen how grumbling, murmuring, complaining and disputing invites the judgment of God but this is not the reason that Paul leaves us with.

Paul says, *"Do all things without complaining and disputing..."* Why? *"that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*

What displeases God is when "children of God" don't act like children of God. A YouTube video depicts a pastor swinging at a female trustee who has just slapped him. When her husband goes after the pastor and is stopped by two men, you can hear the pastor says, *"Let 'em come on, let 'em come on..."*

This video clip has almost 5 million views at the time I prepared this sermon. God says to his church, *"Do all things without complaining and disputing...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..."*

"Blameless" – Free from fault; no defect. To be blameless means that no charge can be sustained against you. No one can pin a charge against you and make it stick. And, if and when you do sin, you apologize and make it right whenever possible.

"Harmless" – Unmixed; unadulterated. It was used of wine not thinned with water; guileless. To be harmless means that you are *sincere*—what they see is what they get. You do not try to look holy and righteous when you are not living that way.

"Without fault" – Without blemish, faultless; unblamable.

Complaining, murmuring and disputing lead to more graver sins. The Christian is to live as *"a child of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation."*

Though the world gets darker around us, Paul says at the end of verse 15 that we “*shine as lights.*” In fact, the darker it gets, the brighter we shine! In Matthew chapter five Jesus tells us that we are the “*light of the world*” then He says a few verses later to “*Let our lights so shine.*”

We don't create the light; we *reflect* the glory of the Lord Jesus so that others may see Jesus in us.

In verse 16, Paul writes that we should “*shine as lights...holding fast the Word of life.*” The “*Word of life*” is the Word of God; it is God's Word as recorded in the Scriptures...the Bible.

In other words, this is not a command to shine, it is a declaration that we are already shining but our “shine” is dependent on our *grip* of the Word of God.

I've been fooling around with electricity since I can remember. As a young boy I had a fascination with flashlights and one thing I quickly learned is that dirt on either end of a battery can impede the flow of electricity and result in a dimmed light.

Here in our text, the “Word of life” is our power source and we are the lights. We are shining but the brilliance of our shine depends on how fast we hold to the Word of life.

The expression, “*Holding fast the Word of life*” does not literally mean to grab a Bible and tighten our grip on it but perhaps this is where some of us need to start. We need to literally get hold of our Bibles. Do you have a Bible? Do you know where it is? When was the last time you opened your Bible outside of the walls of a church?

Notice with me that the KJV says, “*holding forth the Word of life;*” the NIV says, “*hold out the Word of life.*” So now Christians are said to be “shining as lights” and “holding forth the Word of Life”...“in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.”

One Bible commentator says that “We are not only stars to shine but voices to speak.” There should be the twofold testimony of life and lips. We show His love and we tell of His grace.

Some of us may remember our elementary school teachers announcing that the class will have “*Show and Tell.*” This required bringing in something from home and standing before the class talking about it.

Some kids would bring in their pets and others would bring in their favorite toy; they would bring to class something that was important to them—something they felt good about—something they wanted everyone to see and know about.

God is calling the Christian to “*Show and Tell.*” Our brother Peter in his epistle says it this way, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*” (1 Pet 2:9)

We are supposed to “shine as lights” and then “hold out or hold forth the Word of Life.” We must “show and tell!” People need to know how a life in Christ works. We must display and speak on the virtues of knowing Christ.

We need to “show and tell”—this dark world needs to know what a real Christ-follower looks like. We need to “show and tell”—this dark world needs to what real Christian families look like. We need to “show and tell”—People need to see what real Christian marriages looks like.

We need to “show and tell”—this crooked and perverse generation needs to behold what a genuine Christian congregation of believers looks like.

Paul says,

Phil 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you 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;

Phil 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Phil 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,

Phil 2:15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

Phil 2:16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.