

The Interpretation of Philippians 2:12-13

By John C. Kucera

I believe Philippians 2:12-13 to be two of the most misunderstood verses of scriptures in the Bible:

“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.” (Philippians 2:12) At first glance, this looks like the burden of our salvation is totally on us. Now that you are saved you have to work it out, and you really should be very serious about this because you could lose your salvation at any moment. Your salvation is all on you now, and we probably should add these words -“Good luck!” Knowing you, you are really going to need it. The next verse begins to clear that up somewhat and adds some hope to the picture because verse 12 is entirely dependent on verse 13, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.” This kind of stops the bleeding somewhat, but it leaves you thinking, “OK, God is working in me to will and to do of His good pleasure, so now He has to enable me to work out my own salvation, and I better get it right and do this all worked up in fear and trembling.” My focus, however, is still on working out in this physical world what God is working in me because my salvation is not complete until I work it out in all the things that come up in my life. Anyway, that is my take on this verse, and many, I think, come up with the same thoughts even when verse 13 is added. That kind of thinking will inevitably lead to condemnation and focusing on yourself to complete your salvation.

I looked up the Greek words that make up these verses, and the words are translated correctly. I can find no problem there.

Now let's look at the context of these verses. First, let's look at the first four verses of Philippians Chapter 2. Take special note of the word “same.” That word is very important to understanding verses 12 and 13. “If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one

accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." (Philippians 2:1-4) There is a whole lot packed into these four verses that shouts with importance. "If there be any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any bowels (inward affection) and mercy..." You could say, "If there be any benefits to salvation at all..." The author might as well have quoted I Corinthians 13:1-3, "If with the tongues of men and of messengers I speak, and have not love, I have become brass sounding, or a cymbal tinkling; and if I have prophecy, and know all the secrets, and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith, so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing; and if I give away to feed others all my goods, and if I give up my body that I may be burned, and have not love, I am profited nothing."

Paul is very serious here to say the least. What is Paul's joy here? That we all be likeminded, having the same love, in one accord, with one mind. Without everyone having the "same," you will have vain glorying and strife. Paul basically says the same thing in 1Co 1:10-11, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions (strife's) among you." Now, in order for this "sameness" to happen, we all have to have the same reference point for our salvation. We all have to have the same salvation to the same degree. If that is not the case, there is no such thing as "same." Our salvation is the "same" to all, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:12-13) Right when we are born again, we all receive the same. We all were equally to the same degree in Adam, and now we are all equally to the same degree in Christ. We all who have called on the name of the Lord have and share the same salvation. We all have the same reference point for our salvation:

Christ in us to the same degree. Christ does not come in parts. "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (1Corinthians 1:13) We don't share parts of Christ with one another so that we together can have a complete Christ. No, Christ is all and in all to the same degree. That is what the church is, "And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1:22) Everyone that is born of God is born of God to the same degree. God does not have a different salvation for different people. "There is no difference!" Since there is no difference, it is the same salvation to all to the same degree. Paul in 1Corinthians 1:29-31 states just that, "That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Christ is made wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption unto all in Him to the same degree right when one is born again. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son..." (Colossians 1:13) Because we all have the same salvation to the same degree, we don't have to get bogged down in vain glory and strife. Because everyone in Christ has the "same" salvation, the same relationship with God, to the same degree, we can "...in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." and "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." I am not way up here because I have been in Christ for such a long time and have gone through so much and know so much more than someone else, and someone else in Christ is way down there. We all got the same "wage" when we got saved. In Adam, we all got the same wage: sin and death. Now in Christ we all get the same wage: righteousness and eternal life. (Romans 6:23) (see also Matthew 20:1-15) We don't have to keep looking at how much we have, but we can be concerned about the things of others. They have the same salvation as we do. They have the same things, and we declare to them that these things have been freely given to them in Christ. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the

things that are freely given to us of God.” (1Corinthians 2:12)

In Philippians 2:5-11 Paul declares that Christ and Him crucified is the foundation for a salvation that is the same to all. Paul declares Christ coming in the flesh and then His death, burial, and resurrection. In Verses 12 and 13 Paul declares that this very Christ is now in us. Paul is talking to the church here, to those who are born again, to those that have Christ in them. He is saying that the will and good pleasure of God is now in them, and God is working that in them. It's important to know that verse 13 is talking about the Christ who comes into a believer at new birth. In the beginning of the chapter, Paul is talking about the absolute need for all having the same thing. Then he brings in the foundation for all of us having the same thing - Christ and Him crucified. Then He brings in the new birth - this very Christ in us. That very source is the reason we all have the same salvation, that same salvation which is the foundation for the things that Paul states as so important in the first four verses of this chapter, "If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies."

Paul is saying that without this same Christ who comes into a believer when they are born again, there is no basis for all of us having the same thing, and without all of us having the same thing, there is no consolation, no love, and no fellowship. Since the reference point for all this is the new birth, make absolutely sure that you don't lose that reference point. It is so very important to stay connected to the source. The “fear and trembling” of verse 12 is in reference to losing sight of the fullness of Christ that entered your soul when you were born again. Stay fixed on the source of your salvation.

Paul mentions this over and over again throughout his epistles. “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain.”

(Galatians 3:1-4) You began in the spirit; don't try to find perfection in the flesh. When you were born again, the Spirit of Christ in you was and now is the substance and the evidence of your perfect relationship with God. Are you now looking to the external, trying to perfect something that is already perfect? You cannot improve on perfection. This was the gift of rest that came into your soul in the person of Jesus Christ when you came unto him.

These Galatian Christians did not lose their salvation because Paul explains to them in this same chapter what it means to "having begun in the spirit." "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:29) They began with a perfect salvation, and they were now being led to believe that it was not perfect and that they had to add something to it to make it perfect. He tells them the same thing that he is telling the Philippian church in Verse 12, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." (Galatians 4:11). And again to the Corinthian church, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2Corinthians 11:3) And to the Colossian church, "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and *for* them at Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words." (Colossians 2:4) "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (Colossians 2:18-19)

There are so many warnings from Paul relating to "Don't let anyone disconnect you from the Christ that entered your soul when you were born again." Here is what he says in 1Corinthians 3:10-15, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." The foundation is the important thing. That foundation comes into the soul when we are born of God. In an effort to keep these Corinthian Christians on the foundation that was laid when they first came to Christ, he tells them at the end of chapter 3, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (1Corinthians 3:21)

You got it all when you were saved. The right foundation is the one where all who are born of God have the same salvation. I know something about fear and trembling. I was once declaring a gospel where the foundation was how much you know of or about your salvation. In God's dealing with me to move me away from that false foundation to the true foundation of Christ being equally the same to all when they are born again, the Lord really shook me up and made me to know that He was very serious about the foundation.

In summary, Paul is really saying the same thing in Philippians 2:12-13 as he says in Colossians 2:6-10, "As ye have therefore **received** (born again) Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk (work out) ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any

man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power..." (Colossians 2:6-10) That is what Paul means when he says, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..." Walk in what we have received!

In Philippians 3:1-3, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you *it is safe*. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." This is the same warning as Philippians 2:12. "Don't have any confidence in the flesh." You began in the Spirit; stay there. Christ in you is the beginning and ending of your salvation. For it is God who works Christ in you right from the start. For it is God who put you in Christ and made him all spiritual blessings unto you. "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ..." (Ephesians 1:3)

Paul's concern here is the same as the reason Jesus says "Come unto me." It is all about rest for your soul right from the start. Don't get away from that. Why? Because the whole journey after we are saved is all about finding that rest, seeing that rest, knowing that rest that came into our soul when we came to Christ. Don't let anything keep you from finding that rest. If you stay at the source, you will find and see that rest just like Jesus said. Jesus is very certain about that, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8) Christ in you is a sure thing. He is there completely right from the beginning of our salvation. Since He is there in fullness, when you seek, you shall find, and when you knock, the beauty of who He has been made unto you will be revealed. The real security of this is that God knows us by the fullness of Christ not by whether we find what we have received or not, but it is the will of the

Lord that we know as we are known and that we see as we are seen and known in Christ.

Thus Philippians 2:13, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure." This is God revealing in us the way we are known in Christ. Why? "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2Corinthians 4:7). The power has to come from within. Therefore, it is a necessity that we stay steadfast to our first love that came in when we came to Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh.

In conclusion, Paul is saying that since having the "same" salvation is so important to having joy, consolation, and fellowship, we need to really be diligent in staying at the source. Staying at the source enables us to see that everybody's salvation is the same to the same degree. That sameness is the Christ who comes into each believer when they are born again. If we are not diligent in staying at the source, we'll start to think that our salvation is different from others because of varied doctrines and beliefs. If the sameness is lost from sight, the joy, the consolation, and the fellowship will diminish accordingly.

Paul was nearing the end of his ministry when he wrote the book of Philippians. He had been through a lot and seen a lot of things in so many churches. Writing from his experience over the years, he boiled down everything that is so important to our salvation to the word "same." If we don't have the "same," we are missing the very reason we came to Jesus in the first place: Rest for our soul. The only solution for all the differences in the body of Christ is for everyone to have a reference point that is a sure thing and encompasses the "allness" of Christ. That reference point is "Being Born of God." That transaction takes all who are born again from Adam to Christ, from earth to heaven, from sin to righteousness, to the same degree. It is only based on what God sees. That seeing will never change. That seeing always remains the same. Man's seeing and knowing is constantly changing and never remains the same. If the new birth is not the reference point of this sameness, the reference point will be us with all our differences. "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded,

having the same... (Phillipians 2:2)

Lord, open our eyes to the sameness of our salvation and keep us from losing sight of that sameness. Amen.