

# Working Out Salvation, Clean Feet, and the Word of Life

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## Work Out Your Own Salvation — What Does It Mean?

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Philippians 2:12 contains an expression that can puzzle: work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. If I am already saved, what is there to work out? Some have taken this to mean that salvation is not yet fully possessed and must be earned through religious effort. But that contradicts the plain testimony of Scripture that everything is already ours in Christ — we are even now seated with Him in the heavenlies.

First Peter 1:9 gives the clue: receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of your souls. That expression is specific — the soul. And the New Testament uses the word salvation in different senses depending on the context. The salvation of the soul is an accomplished work. The Lord paid for it on the cross; the Spirit applied it; it is complete. But there is another salvation the New Testament speaks of repeatedly as still future and still approaching: the salvation of the body.

Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed — Paul writes that to believers who are already saved. What is getting nearer? Not the salvation of the soul, which is finished. It is the transformation of this body of humiliation into conformity with His body of glory — the event of 1 Thessalonians 4, when the dead in Christ rise and the living are caught up together with them. That is the salvation of the body, still to come. And it is in that light that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you, both the willing and the working according to his good pleasure. — Philippians 2:12–13*

## **Transformation, Not Reformation**

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Ephesians 5:25–27 tells us that Christ gave Himself for the church in order that He might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present the assembly to Himself glorious, having no spot or wrinkle or any of such things, but that it might be holy and blameless. The Lord is working on us now toward that presentation. That work is His, not ours. But our question is: what is our part in it?

Romans 12:1–2 shows us: present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is your intelligent service, and be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The word is transformed — not reformed. There is nothing to reform in the flesh. The flesh cannot be improved; it must be treated as dead, its claims not acted upon. What is needed is a transformation of the mind — a fundamental reorientation of how I think about myself, my body, my time, and my purposes.

We naturally think in terms of incremental improvement. I will cut back from twenty to fifteen and then to ten. I will reduce by stages. But that is not the New Testament's approach to the flesh. An alcoholic is not told to gradually reduce his intake. The only remedy is a complete break. The flesh can create an impressive appearance of reform — it can look outwardly moral and upright. But the Lord sees what is inward. He hears every thought, sees every act of the heart, and is privy to what goes on in the places where no one else sees. What He is looking for is a body presented to Him as a living sacrifice, a mind renewed, a soul that has understood that nothing — not the body, not the time, not the capacities, not anything — belongs to the person who has been bought with a price.

## The Laver — Clean Feet for a World That Dirties Them

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Exodus 30 describes the laver of copper placed between the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron and his sons were required to wash their hands and their feet before entering the tent or approaching the altar. The reason is stated plainly: when they go into the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water that they may not die. Unwashed hands and feet in the presence of God were not merely an oversight — they were incompatible with His holiness.

The priests washed their hands because they had work to do — the perfumer's work, the burning of incense, the service at the altar. The work required clean hands. They washed their feet because they walked through a world that left dirt on everything that touched it.

In John 13 the Lord picks up this imagery directly. He washes His disciples' feet and tells them: he that has washed all over needs not to wash save his feet, but is wholly clean. The bathing — the complete washing — has been done. The new birth, the blood of Christ applied, the soul cleansed: that is once for all. But the feet still need washing because we still walk through a dirty world. The application of the Word of God to the walk, moment by moment, is the washing of the feet. And what Exodus makes plain is that dirty feet cannot enter the presence of God. Clean feet are not optional for the one who wants to draw near.

*He that has washed all over needs not to wash save his feet, but is wholly clean. — John 13:10*

There is a corporate dimension to this too. The Lord washing His disciples' feet shows us that this is a ministry among believers — the Word applied by the brethren to one another. We are to wash one another's feet. When a brother brings the Word to bear on something in my walk, that is feet-washing. When I am in the assembly and the Scripture is opened and it speaks to something in me that needs addressing, that is the washing of water by the Word. The laver was not optional equipment in the tabernacle. It is not optional in the life of a believer

either.

## **Lights in a Crooked and Perverse Generation**

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Philippians 2:15 draws out the visible effect of this: that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life. A light does not need to do anything to be a light except to be a light. It manifests everything around it. The darkness cannot hide in the presence of the light.

But a light that is dimmed — a windowpane that has gone smoky, a lamp that has gathered dust — does not manifest clearly. The washing of the Word keeps the light clean. Without it, the testimony becomes cloudy, and what should be visible to those around us is obscured. The crooked and perverse generation in which we live needs that light more than ever — and the only way it can shine is if those who carry it are maintaining clean feet and renewed minds.

The Word of Life is what we hold forth. There is no other book that can be called a word of life — living, operative, sharper than any two-edged sword. It is the Word that washes the feet; it is the Word that transforms the mind; it is the Word that we hold out to the lost. We cannot hold forth what we are not living. The light and the life cannot be separated — the Lord Jesus is both, and the believer who is walking with Him, feet clean, mind renewed, body presented as a living sacrifice, is the one through whom that light and life can shine in the world.

## **It Is God Who Works in You**

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The great safeguard against all of this becoming another form of self-effort is verse 13: for it is God who works in you, both the willing and the working according to His good pleasure. The willing comes from Him. The power to carry it out comes from Him. The transformation is His work, not ours. We are

His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Our part is not to generate the transformation by our own effort but to yield — to present the body, to renew the mind by reading and meditating on His Word, to wash the feet by returning to the Word when we have walked through a dirty stretch of the world. He does the work. We do not reform the flesh; we reckon it dead and walk in the Spirit. We do not earn the salvation of the body; we receive it when He comes. But we do have a responsibility, and that responsibility is to be conscious of it, to work at it with fear and trembling, knowing that in all of it, it is He who is working in us both to will and to do.

To present a body as a living sacrifice — to have that consciousness at all times that this body belongs to Another and everything done with it must be pleasing to Him — is the work of working out our own salvation. Not thirty steps to improvement. Not incremental reduction. But a whole-hearted yielding to the One whose good pleasure it is to present us to Himself glorious.