

“Follow Christ’s Example”

July 27, 2025

Philippians 2:12-18

I. Introduction

Before we look at these verses, there are two words that probably need to be defined. The first word is *justification*. Romans 4:25 says, “He, i.e. Jesus Christ, was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” *Justification is the act of God declaring men free from the guilt of sin and acceptable to Him* because of Jesus’ death on the cross. Putting it a different way: when a person accepts Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for the payment of his sins and makes Jesus his Lord and Savior, God justifies him—his sins are forgiven.

The second word is *sanctification or sanctified*. The 1st part of 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” 1 Thessalonians 4:7 explains verse 3 this way, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” *Sanctification is the act of living a life pure and holy, separated from the sins of the world*. Justification is a one-time-thing, sanctification is an ongoing process—both are part of being a Christian. As God’s Word is read and studied and one follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Christian’s life is gradually changed—Romans 12:2 says, “Transformed,” and he walks closer and closer to God’s ideal for him. Throughout his whole life, a Christian is to continue to grow as a child of God. In Philippians 3:12 Paul wrote, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

Romans 10:9 illustrates both these concepts: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” When you “*believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead*” you are justified, i.e., your sins are forgiven. When you confess that “*Jesus is Lord*” you are saying that you will do what He wants you to do, your goal is to live a life pure and holy for Him, you are being sanctified. Both justification and sanctification are important for salvation—sins must be forgiven, and lives need to be changed.

Now back to Philippians. The first word in [Phil. 2:12](#) is “Therefore.” Paul is referring back to the example of Jesus Christ, whose perfect example of humility, submission, and obedience were described in [verses 5-8](#). In His incarnation—in His becoming a man—Jesus didn’t grasp or cling to His equality with God the Father but emptied Himself of His divine rights and prerogatives. Taking the form of a humble bond-slave, He was obedient to His heavenly Father, even to the point of dying on the cross as a sacrifice for sin. Paul wrote “your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” [1 John 2:6](#) says, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” Today’s verses describe how one can “Follow Christ’s Example.”

II. Follow Christ’s Example

A. The Method: Continue to Work out your Salvation. If one is going to “Follow Christ’s Example,” Paul wrote that he must “Continue to work out your salvation.” Paul’s message of salvation has always been that one is saved—justified—by grace through faith. [Turn to Eph. 2:8-10](#). As Christians, “the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi” ([Phil. 1:1](#)) had already trusted Christ and have been set apart for Him—they had been justified. But being justified was just the beginning of being a Christian—[Rom. 8:29](#) says, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” The goal or purpose God has for each believer is Christ likeness which includes doing the good works He’s prepared for us. Every Christian’s goal is to become like Christ in humility, submission, and obedience. Sanctification is a lifelong task—[turn to 1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#). The Christian life isn’t a sprint; it is a lifelong marathon.

As believers go about their daily lives, striving to live sanctified lives, humble, submissive, and obedient to God, Paul wrote that they need to recognize who God is. He’s not just “*The Man Upstairs*,” He’s the Awesome, Creator God. When God is recognized for who He really is, we will come before Him “with fear and trembling,” i.e., with awe and reverence. In reverence of the Holy God, we will understand that every sin that we commit is an offense against Him. Every sin offends and grieves Him. This is why we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” ([Matt. 6:13](#)). This is why we need to confess our sins to God as soon as possible—[1 John 1:9](#) promises, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

God doesn't just demand that His children to be humble, submissive, and obedient, He gives them the divine power to carry out His demands—Paul wrote, “It is God who works in you.” Recognizing this, Paul wrote in Col. 1:29, “To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.” God Himself is the believer's supreme and indispensable resource and power as the believer “continues to work out his salvation.” Walking in Jesus' steps (1 Pet. 2:21) isn't easy, but God will help His children to “work them out.”

The power that works in a believer is the power of the Holy Spirit—turn to John 14:15-17. The same Holy Spirit who empowered Christ when He was ministering on earth can empower each Christian as well. But if we are going to obey Jesus' commands and if God's power is going to be working in us, we must spend time daily in the Word of God. We must read it and study it so that it becomes part of our lives. Then the Holy Spirit can use it to give us the direction in which we should go. Another way in which the power of the Spirit can be enhanced and utilized is through prayer—Ephesians 6:18 says, “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying.” Prayer must be the Christian's first line of defense not the last. As a Christian reads God's Word and prays, the Holy Spirit will speak to his heart and mind, and he will become more like Christ. Your life has tremendous potential, and God wants to help you reach that potential. But you must do your part, you must continue to work out your salvation.

B. The results of following Christ's example: Paul then listed some results or effects of following Christ's example and allowing God to work in one's life i.e., as one is sanctified. **The first result is no complaining or grumbling.** Writing about the Jews wandering in the Wilderness as they followed Moses to the Promised Land, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:10, “And do not grumble, as some of them did-- and were killed by the destroying angel.” Being discontent with God's will and complaining or grumbling is an expression of unbelief that prevents one from doing what pleases God. It is sinful for believers to complain about anything the Lord calls them to do or about any circumstance which His sovereignty allows. We need

to remember [Isaiah 55:8](#) where God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."

A 2nd result seen in those who are living a sanctified life is no arguing. In [2 Timothy 2:23](#) Paul wrote, "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels." Arguing destroys the unity that God wants His people to have; the unity Jesus prayed for in [John 17](#) in the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul put it this way, "Do everything without complaining or arguing." Unsaved people complain and find fault, but Christians need to rejoice—turn to [Phil. 4:11-13](#). Like Paul, we need to learn "the secret of being content in any and every situation." This can only happen if we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and use us.

The 3rd result of following Jesus' example and working out one's salvation is a life that seeks to be blameless, pure, and without fault. [Philippians 1:9-10](#) said, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ." As a child of God, the believer is to seek to be absolutely pure, untainted by sin and evil, without fault. This is impossible in a believer's own power. But as [Jude 24](#) says, it is only the blameless and spotless Christ Himself who "is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with greater joy." Because of their justification, believers are blameless in Jesus, but they need to pursue that holy standard—blamelessness—in their daily lives as well.

A fourth result is that in a world of darkness, Christians will shine as stars in the universe. Turn to [Matthew 5:14-16](#). As Christians allow God to achieve His purpose in their lives, they become witnesses in a world that desperately needs Christ. The world has nothing to offer, but through words and actions, the Christian holds out the Word of life, the Gospel, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to all those around them. Every Christian should shine like a star in the universe.

Finally, there will be Joy. In [Phil. 2:16-18](#) Paul wrote that the result of every Christian working out his salvation—of following Christ's example—is joy. Paul described two different times of joy. First, there

is joy on the Day of Christ. **Philippians 1:6** says, “**Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**” “The day of Christ” refers to the day when Christ calls all His children home. On that day, God is going to reward those who have been faithful to Him. The faithful Christian will discover that his sufferings on earth have been transformed into glory in heaven. He will see that his work and his suffering were not in vain. Perhaps he may meet those who had come to know Christ because of things he had said to them—even if he hadn’t been the one to lead them to Christ. Perhaps he may meet those who were influenced to come to Christ through his humility, submission, and obedience to Christ in tough or difficult circumstances. This will be a great reunion—a time of joy.

But Christians don’t have to wait for the return of Christ to start experiencing joy—there is the joy of a submissive mind right now. As Paul wrote in **verses 17-18**, this joy is a present reality, and it comes through sacrifice and service. Most people would associate sorrow with suffering, but Paul sees suffering and sacrifice as doorways to a deeper joy in Christ.

As Paul wrote this letter, he was in jail. It was possible that Paul’s trial would go against him, and he would be executed. But this did not take away his joy—he knew he had “**fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith**” (**2 Tim. 4:7**). He also looked forward to the joy he would have when God called him home. His death would be a willing sacrifice on behalf of Christ and His church, and this would give Paul great joy. “Sacrifice and service” are marks of a submissive mind and the submissive mind experiences joy even in the midst of suffering. Because Paul and the Philippians had sacrificed and served together, they were able to rejoice together.

III. Conclusion

No one can earn their salvation through works. But after one is saved, God expects good works. **Turn to James 2:17-18.** John Calvin put it this way, “*Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.*” Only God can see the heart. He knows if you have saving faith. But those around you can’t see your faith. The only thing they can see is the works of faith. True faith will work itself out so that the people around you will be able to tell that you are different, that you are a Christian. We don’t need to wear

a sign or some sort of symbol to identify ourselves as Christians, our deeds should be enough. As Jesus said in [Matthew 7:16](#), “By their fruit you will recognize them.” What does your fruit say about you? Do you complain about things that come into your life, or do you look at the hard things as times to bring praise and glory to God? Do you shine with the light of God in a sinful world, or can you hardly be seen even up close? Are you filled with joy?

It’s important to note that this walking—this sanctification—is done “in a crooked and depraved generation.” Paul didn’t tell us to retreat from the world and go into some kind of spiritual isolation ward. It is only as we are confronted with the needs and problems of real life that we can become more like Christ and others may see our witness. It’s not by leaving the world but by ministering in it that we see God’s purpose carried out in our lives.

It takes faith to follow in Jesus’ steps. We must believe that God’s promises are true and that they are going to work in our lives just as they worked in Paul’s life and all those before us. [2 Timothy 2:15](#) says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” Many people claim promises from God that He never made; we must study His Word so that we handle it correctly—so that we know what is of God and what is of man. God works in us through His Word, through prayer, through suffering ([Philippians 3:10](#)), and through the Holy Spirit. We work out salvation in daily living as we serve God and follow Christ’s example. God fulfills His purposes in us and in the world as we study and believe and live His Word. For a Christian, life is not a series of disappointing “ups and downs.” Instead, it is a sequence of “ins and outs.” God works in us; we work out in the world. The example comes from Christ—His humility, submission, obedience; the energy and power come from the Holy Spirit; the result is joy. [Philippians 4:4](#) says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” How is your joy? What does your joy or lack of joy say about your humility, submission, and obedience to God? Are you following Christ’s example? *In closing read Philippians 2:5-8.*