

IN RESPONSE - "WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION"

by Dennis Prutow

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Last time we saw the Confession speaks of certain *common operations* of the Spirit. We saw unregenerate persons may have a degree of conviction and a measure of illumination (Westminster Confession of Faith 10: 4).

If we easily confuse decisions made on the natural level under *common operations* of the Holy Spirit with genuine conversion, we may point to Romans 7 to compensate and explain inabilities and failures. This is a misuse of Romans 7.

To attempt to show this is true, I shall look at how Paul exhorts the Christian in Philippians 2:12-13. I shall then compare the Christian in Philippians 2:12-13 with the person in Romans 7. I shall then interact with the popular position as set forth by Professor John Murray.

Philippians 2:12-13 reads as follows.

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Paul exhorts regenerate persons, "Work out your salvation." The word translated *work out*¹ means to achieve, accomplish, do.² Paul gives persons endowed with grace the exhortation. "That grace itself engenders moral facilities and stimulates moral exertions. *Because* grace is given, man must work.... [T]he salvation bestowed by grace is to be carried out...."³ Paul tells the Philippians their salvation "is a process in which they themselves, far from remaining passive and dormant, take a very active part. It is a pursuit, a following after, a pressing on, a contest, a fight, a race...."⁴ "The verb describes not the spirit in which the work

is done, but the aim and the issue—'carry through'...."⁵ The concept itself is neutral. It applies to the working out of good or evil. In Philippians, Paul uses the concept to describe the life of the Christian.

The believer is called to self activity, to active pursuit of the will of God, to the promotion of the spiritual life within himself, to the realization of the virtues of the Christian life, and the personal application of salvation. He must 'work out' what God in His grace has 'worked in'.⁶

We may say the believer must work out the implications of the principle of new life placed in him by God.

Paul tells believers they are able to work out the implications of their salvation. "This is a serious task, to be performed in no self-reliant spirit, but with reverent caution and dependence on God."⁷ You work out the implications of your salvation because God is the one *working* in you. This second word for *working* is the word from which we derive the English energy or energize. God energizes the believer to work out the implications of his salvation. This word "seems always to have the idea of *effective* working."⁸ The word means "works mightily, works effectively."⁹

The posture of Paul in this text is therefore one of victory. It is victory by way of work. It is victory by way of struggle. It is victory by way of setbacks. It is nevertheless still the way of ultimate victory. Paul urges the Philippians to fulfill their duty before God. "[T]he in-

ducement and the ability to engage in it are inducement and ability alike from God.... Engage in the duty because God prompts and enables you...."¹⁰

Paul goes on to speak of "God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." "There are, in any action, two principle parts, the will, and the effective power."¹¹ God is working in the believer in both areas. "The powerful inward working of God affects both the will and the work, the decision of the will and the practical deed."¹² God affects inward determination and resolve.

God so works on the moral nature that it not only intellectually and theoretically approves what is good (Rom. vii. 14-23), but appropriates God's will as its own. The willing wrought by God unfolds into all its positive and determinate movements of the human will to carry God's will into effect.¹³

God's *good pleasure* is the keeping of the moral law. God renews the will and empowers regenerate individuals to carry out His will.

He brings, therefore, to perfection those godly affections which he has inspired in us, that they may not be ineffectual, as He promises Ezekiel, 'I will cause them to walk in my commandments' (Ezek. 11.20).¹⁴

God works in believers to *both* desire and will God's good pleasure *and* carry out His good pleasure. Believers are not left without the ability to work out the implications of their salvation.

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¹ κατεργάζεσθε.

² F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 105.

³ Marvin R. Vincent, *The Epistle to the Philippians and Philemon* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1968), p. 65.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), p. 120.

⁵ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: James and Klock Christian Publishing, 1977), p. 129.

⁶ Jac. J. Muller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 91.

⁷ Vincent, p. 66.

⁸ H. A. A. Kennedy, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1961), vol. 3, P. 441.

⁹ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 116.

¹⁰ Eadie, p. 132.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), vol. ?, p. 254.

¹² Muller, p. 92

¹³ Vincent, *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Calvin, pp. 254-255.

IN RESPONSE - I “WORK OUT” THE PRINCIPLE OF SIN

by Dennis Prutow

Paul uses one of the key words of Philippians 2:12-13 in Romans 7. It is the word translated *work out* in Philippians. It refers to working out the implications of an inner principle. Paul uses this word no less than five times in Romans 7.¹ We now compare what Paul has to say in Romans 7 with what he clearly teaches in Philippians 2. The principle at work here is the clearer passage interprets the passage in dispute.

Romans 7:13:

Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by *effecting*² my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful”

The common place to divide Romans 7 is at verse 14. Calvin divides the text at verse 15. In either case, there is little doubt Paul has in mind the unregenerate person in verse 13. In addition, Romans 7:13 is a section of the book where Paul is exploring the relationship between sin and the law. Paul is showing “[t]he law exposes sin and convicts of it.”³ The law is good. It openly displays the nature of sin. How so?

In verse 9 Paul exclaims, “I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died.” When the law came to me with the power of the Spirit, that law roused sin in the dark grave of my heart. I then realized I was not on the way to heaven but was really headed in the opposite direction. I saw I was a man condemned by God. I was as good as dead, eternally dead, headed for perdition.

In verse 13, Paul asks and then explains,

Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might be shown to be sin, by

working death to me through that which is good;—that through the commandment sin might become exceeding sinful.”⁴

The word translated *working* here is the same word translated *work out* in Philippians 2:12, “Work out your salvation.” In Romans 7:13 the implications of the principle of sin in the unregenerate person are being worked out in the individual’s life. The principle of sin works its havoc. The active principle of sin works in us to will and to do that which is sinful. Sin comes to expression in sinful deeds. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:23). Sin works death by bringing sinful actions to fruition. With this, we pass into the disputed passage.

Does Romans 7:14-25 refer to a regenerate person or to someone who is unregenerate? Here is my position. “The section which follows explains more fully by a psychological analysis how it is the Law is broken and that sin works such havoc.”⁵

Romans 7:14-15:

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what *I am doing*, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.⁶

As just noted, Paul’s logic in verses 14-25 is simple and direct. He offers proof of the important principle set forth in verse 13.⁷ “Did then that which is good become death unto me? God forbid. But sin...” Therefore, “the sequel [verses 14-25] is designed to illustrate and confirm what he has said in respect to the law and sin, in verse 13.”⁸

⁴ America Standard Version, 1901, italics added. *Working* is *effecting* in NASV.

⁵ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1964), p. 181.

⁶ Italics added. The words “I am doing” translate *κατεργάζομαι*.

⁷ John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (New York: Fleming H. Revel Company, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 281.

⁸ Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: William Tegg and Co., 1862), p. 326.

The preceding passage (7:7-13) described the encounter with the law as a quasi-historical narrative about the past. It contrasted life before or apart from the law with what happened when the “commandment” sprang to life in full virulence, bringing death in its train. Now, changing to the present tense, the “I” describes “from the inside,” as it were, the enduring consequences of that fatal encounter: the situation of “ethical impossibility” that results from having been “sold in slavery under sin” (v 14).⁹

Because the law comes from God, it has the character of God; it is spiritual. On the other hand, Paul confesses. “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.” The law is spiritual; I am fleshly, carnal. How carnal? I am sold in bondage to sin.

The phrase argues strongly against the view that the passage as a whole reflects present Christian experience. The entire argument in 6:15-23 turns around the thesis that believers’ former slavery to sin has been replaced by a slavery to righteousness.”¹⁰ Paul says this clearly in Romans 6:18. “Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

In Romans 7:15 Paul describes slavery to sin. He “describes slavery so as not to excuse himself, but to accuse the tyranny of sin and to deplore his own misery....”¹¹ I “carry into effect” or “put into execution” sin.¹² I *work out* the principle of sin within me. The word means “to effect, to bring about by one’s own work.”¹³ “[I]t designates the habitual doing or practicing of anything.”¹⁴

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⁹ Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 225.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹¹ Bengel, p. 283.

¹² Sanday and Headlam, p. 181.

¹³ James Denny, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), vol. 2, p. 641.

¹⁴ Stuart, p. 329.

¹ Romans 7:13, 15, 17, 18 and 20

² Italics added. The word, *effecting*, New American Standard Version, translates the word I’m particularly interested in, *κατεργαζομένη*.

³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. 254.

IN RESPONSE - "I PRACTICE WHAT I HATE"

by Dennis Prutow

As we continue to see in Romans 7:15, Paul refers to what is worked out in his life as the implications of the inner governing principle of sin. He explains it this way. "I am not practicing¹ what I would like to do, but I am doing² the very thing I hate." What does the Bible say of someone who fails to practice righteousness but practices evil instead?

Paul answers this question after he lists the deeds of the flesh. "Those who practice³ such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). The apostle John adds.

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice⁴ righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

We see also in Romans 7:15 that Paul has a wish to do good things. "But this will which puts itself on the side of the law is nothing more than a desire, a wish, a simple *I should like*, which gives way in practice."⁵ We must not miss this point: There is a willing but a conspicuous failure in the area of doing.

If the reader has any question whether this last statement is in accordance with the apostles view of unsanctified human nature, he needs but to turn back and read Romans ii. 14, 15, in order to dissipate his doubts. That the unregenerate have reason and conscience, which approve and must approve divine law, shows nothing more than that they are *rational* and *moral* beings with faculties adapted to a state of moral probation, and that they are made in the image of God so far as a rational and moral nature is concerned. This is merely saying that they are men, and not brutes. The faculty to discern what is good, the power to approve of it, is in itself no more holy or sinful, than the faculty of ratiocination is, or of seeing or hearing. Nothing can be

more unfounded, than the supposition that *moral good* is put to the account of the sinner merely because one assigns to him reason to discern its nature and the conscience to approve it. Without these he could not be a rational and moral being. They are mere *pura naturalia*, to speak in the language of the old theology.⁶

So here is the dilemma of the person in Romans 7:15. "'I have lost control of the moral direction of my life and another force has taken over, a force dubbed again and again as 'sin dwelling within me'....'"⁷ The person experiencing this dilemma is under conviction. He or she sees the problem of sin but cannot see a way out of it.

John Murray hesitates between two opinions in his interpretation. Murray says the Authorized version suggests that the apostle distinguishes between his determined wish and that which is executively willed and effected.... On this interpretation it is much the same quality as our word "wish" or "desire". It is doubtful, however, if this is strong enough to express the thought. There appears to be the determined volition, that is to say, will to the fullest extent of volition, though not of executive volition, for in that event it would pass into the sphere of practice which in this instance is excluded.⁸

Murray admits Paul expresses a will to act which is less than necessary to pass into practice. But this differs completely from the will expressed in Philippians 2:12-13 which does pass into practice as Calvin so well states.

He brings, therefore, to perfection those godly affections which he has inspired in us, that they may not be ineffectual, as He promises Ezekiel, 'I will cause them to walk in my commandments' (Ezek. 11.20)."⁹

Paul tells us since a firm *will* is lacking, positive action is also lacking. On the other hand, in Philippians 2:12-13, in the

Christian, we see both the willing *and* the doing of God's good pleasure. In addition, Paul confesses the situation in Romans 7:15 is not simply occasional. Paul says he fails in *practice*.

Romans 7:16-17.

But if I do the very thing I do not want to do I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing¹⁰ it, but sin which dwells in me.

Paul says there is internal agreement with the requirements of the moral law.

The reprobation with which Paul's conscience visits his own work, is a solemn homage rendered by him to the law, for thereby he takes part with the law against himself.¹¹

Paul's agreement with the law in this way is simply "the *approbation* of the reason and conscience."¹² Preaching on Romans 2:21-23, W. G. T. Shedd makes this observation which applies here.

The text then, together with the chains of reasoning that are connected with it, leads to consider the fact, that a man can admire and praise moral excellence without possessing or practicing it himself; that *the approbation of goodness is not the same as the love of it*.¹³

There can be, on the part of the unregenerate, an admiration of moral excellence and at the same time a total inability to perform that same moral good.

The root problem is sin dwelling within, making its home within. We can read verse 17 as follows. "So now, no longer am I the one working it out,¹⁴ but sin which dwells within me." This is the direct opposite of Philippians 2:12-13. Paul urges, "Work out your salvation." How so? God "is at work within you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

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¹ πράσσω.

² ποιῶ.

³ πράσσουντες.

⁴ ποιῶν.

⁵ F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), p. 284.

⁶ Stuart, pp. 328-329.

⁷ Byrne, p. 227.

⁸ Murray, p. 262.

⁹ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 10, pp. 254-255.

¹⁰ κατεργάζομαι.

¹¹ Godet, p. 284.

¹² Stuart, p. 332.

¹³ W. G. T. Shedd, *Sermons to the Natural Man* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 288.

¹⁴ κατεργάζομαι.

IN RESPONSE - SIN CONTROLS ME

by Dennis Prutow

We are seeing the principle of sin is working out its death as Paul confesses in Romans 7:13. "In the grip of sin as indwelling power, 'I' can only helplessly aspire to obey the law but find no capacity to achieve what I desire."¹ In other words, Paul recognizes sin is the ruling principle in his life.

Romans 7:18-19:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing² of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

Paul has already confessed the principle of sin, making its home in him, has its way and its out working, verse 17. Paul elucidates by saying nothing good dwells in him. He describes himself by adding the phrase, in my flesh. Charles Hodge notes,

Paul frequently employs similar modes of expression. When speaking of his apostolic labours, he says, 'Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me,' 1 Cor. 15:10. And in Gal. 2:20, he says, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'"³

Hodge goes on to say,

[N]o one supposes that the labours and life here spoken of were not the labours and life of the apostle, or that they did not constitute and express his moral character.⁴

By the same token, we should not doubt Romans 7:18 speaks of the life of the apostle Paul and expresses his moral character at a different time and in a different phase of God's dealings with him. After all, Paul began the paragraph with a confession in verse 14, "I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin."

Paul goes on to explain his position in verse 18 with this clause: "for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not." Again, Paul tells us there is a will, a wish, a desire, to accomplish the good pleasure of God. At the same time

Paul admits there is within him no ability to do, to work out,⁵ this good pleasure. Paul's

experience tells him, that while the inner man, the reason and the conscience, approves of and consents to that which is good, the carnal man has no power or inclination or readiness to accomplish it.⁶

Not only so, Paul explains and tells us, "I practice⁷ the very evil I do not wish" (verse 19). This affirms the power to practice the good is absent.

Compare what Paul says in Romans 1:32-2:3. He uses the word translated *practice* no less than five times.

Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who *practice*⁸ such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who *practice*⁹ them. Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge *practice*¹⁰ the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who *practice*¹¹ such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who *practice*¹² such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? (italics added).

Those practicing evil are under judgment. They are under condemnation. In Romans 7:18-19, Paul realizes he is under such condemnation. His character is that of the flesh. He does not have it within him to *work out* that which is good. He *practices* evil.

This is the opposite of the position taken by Paul in Philippians 2:12-13. There Paul exhorts, "Work out your salvation." Work out the implications of grace within you. How so? God is at

work in you. As said above, you work because God works. In the case before us, Paul confesses a far different situation faces him.

There is a wish and desire to do good. The working out of that good is *not* present with him or in him. *If this is the case, God is not working in him both to will and to do for His good pleasure.* This is a literal view of the text. Strangely, Hodge finds a literal understanding of the text offensive. He speaks of "strong and expressive language, though susceptible of literal interpretation, which would make it teach not only error but nonsense..."¹³ Paul's position is not nonsense. It makes perfect sense when properly understood.

Romans 7:20, "But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing¹⁴ it, but sin which dwells in me." Paul does the opposite of his fervent wish. Is Paul able to control himself? He does not think so. I am not in control. I am not *working out* in my life that which I know is right. Who or what is in control? The principle of sin is in control and working out the implications of its evil in my life. "I am not master of myself; a stranger has forced his way into my house and holds me captive."¹⁵

My argument regarding Romans 7 is simple. I compare the person in Romans 7 with the persons Paul exhorts in Philippians 2:12-13. The person in Romans 7 does not have it within him to work out God's good pleasure. *This person does not have it within him to follow Paul's command in Philippians 2:12-13.* On the other hand, the persons to whom Paul speaks in Philippians 2:12-13 are urged to work out the implications of their salvation *because God is at work within them.* For these reasons, I affirm the man in Romans 7 is *not* regenerate. As I hope to show, he is a person under conviction, under *common operations* of the Holy Spirit. Next we will interact with the views of Professor John Murray.

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¹ Byrne, p. 227.

² κατεργάζεσθαι.

³ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliot, 1835), p. 289.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ κατεργάζεσθαι.

⁶ Stuart, p. 334.

⁷ πράσσω.

⁸ πράσσουντες.

⁹ πράσσουσιν.

¹⁰ πράσσεις.

¹¹ πράσσουτας.

¹² πράσσουτας.

¹³ Stuart, pp. 288-289.

¹⁴ κατεργάζομαι.

¹⁵ Godet, p. 286.