

"WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION"

"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. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Philipians 2:12-13

This meaningful passage is crowded with doctrine, instruction and exhortation. Paul was always intensely practical. He never divorced learning and life. He always related doctrine and duty, creed and character, faith and life.

To whom were these words, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," addressed? Is this exhortation to the saved or to the unsaved? Beyond the peradventure of a doubt this exhortation was addressed to those who were saved already through a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No proof of this assertion is necessary because the whole epistle was written to the saved. In the first verse we are told that it was being written "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." It is perfectly clear that the entire epistle is addressed to the children of God. And it is a timeless message to the saints of all times. Unless one is a Christian, this text has nothing to do with him. Unless one is resting in the finished work of Christ, this exhortation does not have any application whatever to him, because he does not have any salvation to work out.

Paul had been preaching in Philippi. The Lord had wonderfully blessed his ministry, sinners had been saved, and a church had been organized. Paul was writing to his converts with whom he had fallen very deeply in love, which love had been reciprocated, both for the Gospel's sake and for his own. Their love was the type that impels one to sacrifice self for the benefit of others.

Paul had a very complimentary message for the Philippian Christians. He commended them for their constant obedience. They were not like children who obey only until the parent's or teacher's back is turned. They had obeyed faithfully both when he was present and when he was absent. It is very poor obedience that only does what will be noticed. None are so worthy of praise as those whose obedience to the Word of God is quite independent of the knowledge and admiration of men.

This exhortation, "Work out your own salvation," does not mean to work for your salvation. This is true for two reasons: first, Paul was writing to those who were already saved, and second, salvation is not a work of man for God, but a work of God for man, a work that was accomplished at the cross.

Salvation is a very inclusive term. It has different meanings. To save implies to impart life. Salvation, therefore, means participation in the life of the Lord. Salvation sometimes expresses the whole experience of a believer from the time he accepts Christ as Saviour until he is made perfect in glory. It may be used in referring to either the entrance into the family of God, the entire process, or the consummation at the end. It may denote deliverance from the penalty of sin, or deliverance from the power of sin, or deliverance from the presence of sin. It includes the whole process of deliverance from sin from the beginning to the end. It includes everything that takes place in and for the believer from the moment he believes in Christ to the time when he enters, in his resurrected and glorified body, into the heaven of eternal peace and rest. Salvation is a past transaction with the believer, is a present operation in the Christian life, and is a future consummation of the Christian in glory. We are saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

When a man is saved his sins are forgiven. He is no longer a slave, but a free man, enjoying the liberty which Christ bestows upon His people. New life is imparted to him. This life shows itself in newness of conduct. A new outlook is given to him. Before a man becomes a Christian whatever way he looks is alarming. The past is dismal, the present is threatening, and the future is full of the lightnings of wrath. But when a man becomes a Christian neither the past nor the present causes alarm, while the future is filled with prospects that enrapture the soul. Surely great things are done for a man when he becomes a Christian!

Salvation may denote deliverance from the penalty of sin, or the deliverance from the power of sin, or final deliverance from the presence of sin. Here the meaning is related to deliverance from the power of sin.

How can one obtain salvation? The Word of God plainly tells us that salvation is a gift from God. It cannot be merited or purchased, but it is a gift from the Lord, without any limitation except that it be accepted.

I. The Individuality Of Salvation.

"Work out your own salvation." No child of the best Christian parents can obtain salvation from or through the parents. He must have it as his very own. If you are saved it will be "your own salvation," and you yourself will enjoy it.

II. The Involvement Of Salvation.

"Work out." These words are the translation of a Greek word which means "to carry on to completion," or "to carry to its ultimate conclusion," God's work in us. Thus Christians are urged to carry their salvation to its ultimate conclusion, namely, Christ-likeness. This idea is conveyed in the statement, "the student worked out a problem in arithmetic." That simply means he carried the problem to its ultimate conclusion. In this passage Paul is writing to those who have already accepted Christ, and who have found pardon and new life through faith in Him. He is urging them to carry on to the end the work of grace already begun; to carry their salvation to completion. There are victories to be won. There are virtues to be developed. There are crowns to be obtained.

The believer's part of salvation is working out what God has worked in. Working out is involved in working in. The working in initiates and involves the working out. No unsaved man can ever work the work of salvation. Only the saved man can work out salvation.

No man can do any work to save his soul, but every saved man will work when his soul has been saved. There is nothing in the natural man to produce salvation, but there is something in the spiritual man to produce works. Involved in the divine working in is the human working out. Man cannot procure salvation or merit it by any work of his own. God worketh the salvation within the soul and man worketh that salvation out in the Christian life. The working in is the divine part. The working out is the human part. As believers in Christ we are to work our salvation out into conduct and character. We are to give expression to our faith in words and deeds. We are to translate an experience of grace, which has taken place in our hearts, into the terms of everyday living, glorified by the highest motives and the most exalted ends.

III. The Interest Of Salvation.

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." I do not understand these words to imply anything like terror, or dread, or apprehension of God. His people are delivered from that kind of thing. It is not the fear of others, but fear of self. It is the fear or dread that we shall not do what we ought to do to the honor of God, trembling lest we would do what would offend Him.

It does not mean a fear that brings us into bondage, which brings the frost and chill on your soul. It is not a bondage of fear, not a fear of the loss of divine love, but it is the fear of an unholy weariness in the task of love and a dread lest we should fail to live for Christ. It is the caution which timidly shrinks from whatever would offend and dishonor the Saviour. This fear is begotten by the anxiety to please. It is not the fear of hell that drives the Christian to his

duty with anxiety, but it is the fear that he might fall short of his best. It is the fear that he might become entangled with the things of evil and thus injure his influence and usefulness. It is the fear or dread of offending the Lord.

IV. The Inwardness Of Salvation.

"For it is God which worketh in you." It is encouraging to know that salvation is of the Lord. From Him comes the desire by which we long for it, the grace by which we attain it, and the power by which we live it. All is of grace.

Salvation is the biggest thing in the world. It commences in God and continues in God and consummates in God. He is the one who puts the desire in our hearts, and makes us want to be saved. We never would want to be saved if God did not put that desire in our hearts.

"Worketh in you" literally means "to communicate the energy", or "to put into operation." Both in salvation and in service God energizes the will. No man will want to be saved unless his will is moved by God. No saved man will want to work unless his will is moved by God. All the preaching in the world will not make a saint willing to live or to give if his will is not moved by God. God gives the suggestion, the impulse, the inclination, the desire, and even the power to carry out the impulse. He is the one who has created every desire for a better life, and every hate for the old life. He not only worked in us to make us want these things, but He will help us to do them. He works in the soul of the believer the will to love others, to abstain from evil, to be devoted to Christ, to discover God's will, and to live above reproach. If we have any holy thoughts, God gives them to us. If we have any great desire for righteousness, it comes from Him. All righteous impulses come from God. He creates in us the will to do His will. When we decide to turn the desire into the deed, the power of God is there also. Thank God, we do not have to provide the power. God worketh in you the inspiration, the assistance, the power, and the grace. Here is the absolute sovereignty of God in human salvation. God worketh in man "to will, to desire, and to choose." There is a divine gift in the will to do and a divine gift in the power to do. Salvation, from beginning to end, is altogether of grace. To will has to do with the beginning; to do has to do with the persevering accomplishment.

V. The Intention Of Salvation.

"Of his good pleasure," or "for the sake of his good pleasure." Our Lord has saved us for more than our escape from hell. He has saved us for more than our entrance into heaven. He has saved us for His good pleasure. Your salvation is your trust, not to do with as you please but to use as God pleases, your own individual possession to be used by you for God's glory. Shall we be unfaithful to the trust committed to us by God in the salvation of our souls?

The fact that God works in us ought to be the incentive to our own activity. All life is supported by reciprocation--action and reaction. This is certainly an encouraging motive. The Lord is working in you whatever good impulse you feel. Look upon that as a token of His presence and His readiness to help you in this work. The divine pattern for the life of every Christian is "Both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "His good pleasure" implies that which pleases Him we do, and what we do pleases Him. After all, the best life is the life that pleases God.

Do you have this salvation which God has provided through His Son? It is free. God does not want anyone to be lost, but that all should turn from their wicked ways and be saved. He is offering the greatest thing in the world--freedom from sin and a home in heaven--on the very best terms that can be found. It is only believe. It is not something to do, but Someone to trust. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."