

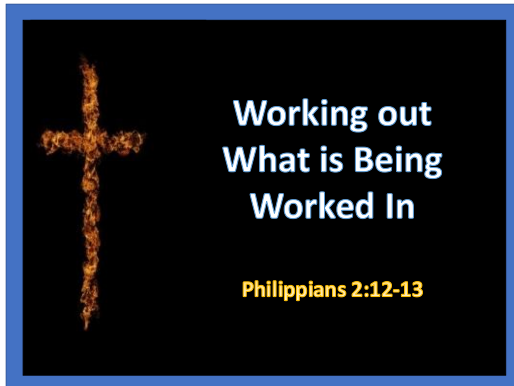
## Working out What's Being Worked In

### Philippians 2:12-13

Online Sermon:

[http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

Ever since God said, “let Us make mankind in our image, in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26), the eternity He placed in our



hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) keeps us yearning to draw nearer to our Lord (James 4:8)! Though God created us “a little lower than the angels and crowned us with honor and glory” (Hebrews 2:6-7) our attempts to know and touch God

sometimes feel like an exercise in futility. While we would like to blame the lack of closeness to God as solely being the inevitable by-product of living in a fallen world with so many temptations, countless people like Simon Stylites who sat on top of a pillar fifty feet high<sup>1</sup> and the Egyptian hermit Anthony who lived in the desert just to keep from having any contact with the

world<sup>2</sup> did not lead to holiness but merely proved that what was learned on the mountaintops was of little value unless shared in a community of love.<sup>3</sup> While it is unlikely that a person knows the Lord unless he/she “wants to extend the boundaries of the Master’s kingdom,”<sup>4</sup> how does one “become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation” (Philippians 2:15),<sup>5</sup> when the Bible states none of us are righteous, not a single one (Romans 3:10-18)? Obviously, it must be possible to please God if not then why would He command us to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16) and to let our “shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)?

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The following sermon is going to examine Philippians 2:12-13 to suggest that the call to work out our salvation with fear and trembling is not an exercise of futility but one that is not only attainable but an expectation from the Lord because He is the one who works in us to will and act to fulfill His purpose!

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Apostle Paul masterfully explains that while salvation is attainable only by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ,<sup>6</sup> we are

<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 141.

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 141.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 141.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “Working out What Is Worked in.” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 387.

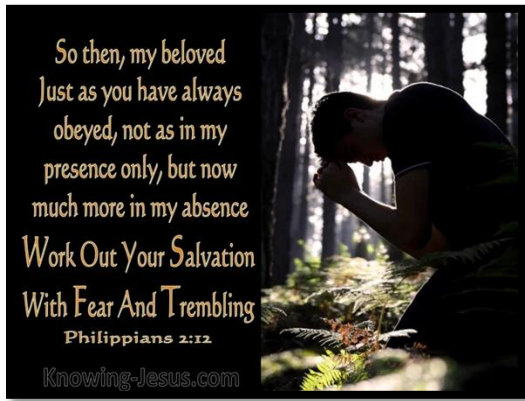
<sup>5</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 235.

<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, *Sermons, on Several Occasions* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

called to put every effort into maximizing our spiritual potential<sup>7</sup> by relying on His grace to transform our minds and enable us to obtain the full measure of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit!

## Work out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling

Considering the vicarious sacrifice of He who emptied Himself by becoming obedient to death (Philippians 2:6-10),



even death on a cross, Paul says we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (verse 12)! Since we “did not receive a spirit that makes us a slave again to fear (Romans 8:15),<sup>8</sup> “fear” is not meant to be taken literally to mean

“cowering”<sup>9</sup> that God will crush you for your sins, for this would

go against His grace and mercy! For Paul “fear and trembling” in this passage refers to “quaking with a holy awe” at the majesty, sacrifice and supremacy of our Lord, Saviour, and King! We tremble lest in our “carnal security and recklessness”<sup>10</sup> we might sin and in doing so disappoint and grieve the Spirit of God in whom we are sealed.<sup>11</sup> The fear Paul is talking about is the same one whom Isaiah cried out “woe to me, I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips” (6:5) and caused Apostle John to “fall down as though dead” in the presence of the Lord. From Paul we learn that salvation is deeply personal!<sup>12</sup> Asking Christ to be the Lord of our lives is not a trivial thing but a life-time commitment to deny oneself, take up one’s cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24)!<sup>13</sup> Those who have been reconciled unto Christ are called to “live a life worthy of the Gospel” (Philippians 1:27).<sup>14</sup> “Obedience is not defined in legal terms but in relational terms”<sup>15</sup> for to have one’s mind renewed so that one might know and obey His perfect and pleasing will must be done in an act of awe and wonder<sup>16</sup> of His love.

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*While one is to fear the discipline of the Lord (Hebrews 12:6), our primary motivation as Christians ought to be to become more like Him by lovingly inviting and accepting His transformative grace in our lives!*

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony T. Evans, “[Good Works: The Responsibility of Spiritual Growth.](#)” in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 1997), Php 2:12.

<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 82.

<sup>9</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 153.

<sup>10</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “[Working out What Is Worked in.](#)” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 394.

<sup>11</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “[Working out What Is Worked in.](#)” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 394.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Witherington III, [Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 159.

<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, [Sermons, on Several Occasions](#) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

<sup>14</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 171.

<sup>15</sup> G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 171.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon D. Fee, [Paul’s Letter to the Philippians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 237.

Working out our salvation by fear and trembling is also having a total reliance on God<sup>17</sup> for His protection, wisdom, and strength to carry one through the darkest of valleys in life with the glorious hope and expectation that faith produces perseverance and spiritual maturity (James 1:2-4) amongst those who watch and pray (Matthew 26:41) without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) that one might be able to discern and obey His will for one's life!

## God's Working in You

Before one can strive to realize "God's love, peace, holiness, goodness, and justice in one's life,"<sup>18</sup> one must first become born again. Apostle Paul does not state one is to work "for" or "towards" one's salvation but to "work out" the salvation one has already received.<sup>19</sup> Since no one is righteous, and all have fallen short of the glory of God it is not possible for people to become saved till "God enlightens our minds"<sup>20</sup> and moves our wills to accept the way, truth and life found in His Son Jesus! To the church of Ephesus Paul wrote, "for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast (2:8). It is not by human effort but faith in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord that one receives the gift of God of having the Holy Spirit regenerate a person<sup>21</sup> from death<sup>22</sup> to partakers

of His divine nature, everlasting life, and inheritors of His glory.<sup>23</sup> Paul uses the phrase "work out" in relation to salvation to remind us that our path to becoming saved is one solely based



on faith in Christ's atonement, grace and mercy. "So, in one sense salvation of every person is complete, and complete without any working on a person's part, seeing that it is finished we are complete in

Jesus!"<sup>24</sup> It is not by secluding ourselves from the world by sitting on a flagpole or by isolating oneself in a desert, reading our Bibles everyday, praying without ceasing, feeding the poor or taking care of the widows that makes a person a son or daughter of the Father but through faith in Christ and by being born again of the water and Spirit (John 3:5) and therefore being adopted as His very own child (John 1:12)! If this were not so and one could earn one's salvation, then grace would not be grace!<sup>25</sup> Paul is not saying that once a person receives their new nature the old one is destroyed<sup>26</sup> and one automatically becomes holy and attains the full measure of Christ but merely that the only part we play in passing from death to life is faith in Christ's

<sup>17</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 120.

<sup>18</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 144.

<sup>19</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 142.

<sup>20</sup> Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 42.

<sup>21</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "Working out What Is Worked in," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 386.

<sup>22</sup> John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

<sup>23</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "Working out What Is Worked in," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 386.

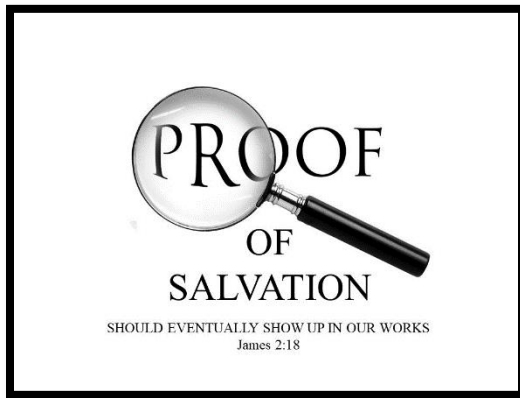
<sup>24</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "Working out What Is Worked in," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 386.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony T. Evans, "Good Works: The Responsibility of Spiritual Growth," in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 1997), Php 2:12.

<sup>26</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "Working out What Is Worked in," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 386.

grace and mercy to save us from our sins, for without His aid one would forever be entangled in the wages of sin which is death (Hebrews 12:1; Romans 6:23).

While we must not believe our salvation is earned by good works we certainly are to “believe in salvation that does work!”<sup>27</sup> Though upon being born again the old nature with all



its problems, misconceptions, sins, fears, and doubts remains;<sup>28</sup> what changes is that one has received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who teaches and enables one to follow the truth concerning Christ!<sup>29</sup> While

without Christ we can do nothing,<sup>30</sup> with Him we can do all things because the Spirit of God living inside of us has “broken the yoke”<sup>31</sup> or “power of sin” within our hearts. In verse thirteen

Paul states that God works inside of us to will and to act to fulfill His purpose. “Through His Spirit, God empowers Christians to discern, desire and do the will of God. God is the one who accomplishes this work”<sup>32</sup> but not without effort on our part. If we are to attain the fullness of Christ,<sup>33</sup> then we must not only live but keep in step with the Spirit’s leading (Gal. 5:25).<sup>34</sup> We are not called to legalistically obey a “set of rules that regulate our conduct” but instead as ones who are no longer enslaved to sin are to rejoice that the Spirit has empowered one to have one’s mind renewed daily (Romans 12:1-2).<sup>35</sup> We are to follow and love His commands that are no longer burdensome (1 John 5:3) but the very source of pleasing God the Father in heaven!

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*While we cannot “partner with God in our justification,”<sup>36</sup> we are called to “show outwardly what God has done inwardly.”<sup>37</sup>*

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James urgently wrote, “what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds” ... “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (2:12, 17).<sup>38</sup> Since God is the one who wills, empowers, and works in you<sup>39</sup> there is no excuse to not know and fulfill the good purpose God

<sup>27</sup> Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 43.

<sup>28</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 143.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 105.

<sup>30</sup> John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

<sup>31</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “Working out What Is Worked in.” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 388.

<sup>32</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 154.

<sup>33</sup> John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 154.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 238.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony T. Evans, “Good Works: The Responsibility of Spiritual Growth.” in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 1997), Php 2:12.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 42–43.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 43.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 105.

has prepared you in advance to accomplish (Ephesians 2:10). The only reason a born-again believer would not attain the fullness of Christ in their lives then, according to Paul, would be due to not allowing the new nature that is empowered by the Spirit of God Himself to rule in one's life!

Working out our salvation in fear and trembling means through grace and His might, power, and guidance becoming holy as He is holy by fulfilling His good purpose for one's life!<sup>40</sup> God is the master sculptor who sees within us the potential to do miracles even greater than His Son did while here on earth (John 14:12-14)! Our spiritual journey might seem fraught with



burdens, trials, tribulations, and so many sins that we have a hard time seeing His will in our lives. If we were to see our walk with God like a game of scrabble then

we would soon realize that the letters to form the words obedience, faith, grace, mercy, empowerment, guidance, and so many more have already been provided!<sup>41</sup> The Master Potter sees within our rough form of clay the image by which we were created and knows those fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalms 139) just a little lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:7)

<sup>40</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "[Working out What Is Worked in.](#)" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 395.

<sup>41</sup> Anthony T. Evans, "[Good Works: The Responsibility of Spiritual Growth.](#)" in *Tony Evans Sermon Archive* (Tony Evans, 1997), Php 2:12.

<sup>42</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [Philippians: An Expositional Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 145.

have the potential to soar on wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31) when they put their faith and trust in He who was and is forevermore (Revelation 22:13). "If you have come to God, it is only because God has first entered your life by his Holy Spirit to quicken your will, to open your eyes to his truth, and to draw you irresistibly to Himself. It is only after this that you can choose the path that He sets before you."<sup>42</sup>

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*Though your inner life be subject to thousands of dangers and the "roots of your selfishness that often go very deep,"<sup>43</sup> remember that while God cannot be satisfied with our filthy rags of righteousness "He is satisfied and pleased" with the submissive heart that tries to do good through the power of His one and only Son!<sup>44</sup>*

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So, let us throw off the sin that so easily entangles and live the will of God who never stops working in us to act and fulfill His good purpose in our lives!

## Conclusion – We can Finish Well

Let me conclude by saying that our light shines brightest when it is submissive and deeply in love with the One who have given us life! It would be remiss to not mention that the passage

<sup>43</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "[Working out What Is Worked in.](#)" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 393.

<sup>44</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [Philippians: An Expositional Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 146.

today was a letter to the church of Philippi which stressed the working out of our salvation not only for our own benefit of drawing nearer and becoming like God but also to let our light shine before the world!<sup>45</sup> “To esteem others instead of “depreciating them”<sup>46</sup> or worse yet writing them off as unredeemable, means one needs not only to exhibit a meek and lowly spirit of love towards others that is best demonstrated by holiness that can only be found by becoming a living sacrifice that is transformed daily to know and obey His “good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1-2). If our appeal as Christ’s



ambassadors, that all be reconciled unto God, be holy and acceptable in His sight, then our inward transformation received by grace and faith must be evident not only in our own lives but amongst the people

of this world who are dying in their sins! Yes, if we are to let our Light shine “like stars in the sky” (Philippians 2:14) “our life must be spent in constant watching, and, as we find ourselves tripping, we must add constant repentance, perpetually praying to be upheld for the future, unceasingly struggling to attain something yet beyond, pressing forward evermore”<sup>47</sup> to attain the goal in which Christ Jesus has laid before us.

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*May we never forget that “God’s willing always comes before our doing,”<sup>48</sup> but out of love for Him and those around us may we never forget the privilege, honor, and divine enabling we have received to do miracles in His name with assurance that through the blood of Christ our feeble attempts to be holy as He is holy can and will be realized as a sweet fragrance unto Him!*

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And if we work out our salvation with fear and trembling then when the Lord returns, we will be able to “boast that we did not run in vain!”

Amen!

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<sup>45</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, vol. 11, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 104.

<sup>46</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “[Working out What Is Worked in.](#)” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 392.

<sup>47</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “[Working out What Is Worked in.](#)” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 14 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1868), 394.

<sup>48</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 144.