

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

God at Work in You, Part 1

Scripture: Philippians 2:12

Code: 50-19

As you know, we go through books because God wrote them and every word of God is pure. And we are now in Paul's wonderful letter to the church at Philippias we look at verses 12 and 13 this morning, and next Lord's day as well. Before we get into the text itself, I want to set up its thought and intent and how it practically speaks to our lives with a little bit of a background.

Recently when I was in Florida, I had occasion to preach on the subject of spiritual self-discipline. It took the text of Peter where he says, "Gird up the loins of your mind," pull in the loose ends of your life. And he really has a lot to say about the disciplined life. And there were comparative passages that were equally stressing the discipline of spiritual living and the tremendous day to day commitment to a zealous, faithful, devoted, diligent, spiritual walk. And when I had poured out my heart on this matter for about an hour, I finished and a lady came to me afterwards and wanted to take exception to what I said, which is not an uncommon experience of me or any other preacher. She came to me and she said, "I do not agree with what you said."

And I said, "Something specific?"

And she said, "No, everything."

And I said, "Well, I'm not exactly sure what you mean by that."

And she said, "Well I think you have it all wrong when it comes to spiritual living. You have it all wrong when it comes to sanctification of a believer. You see, we don't do anything. There's no call for self-discipline. There's no call for this effort. We don't do anything but yield to God. And when we yield to God we let Him do it all."

And I said, "Oh, I see."

She said, "All that is necessary is to surrender and then God will do it all."

Now that poses the question which is really, I think, germane to our text and that is this question: what is the believer's role in sanctification and what is God's role? What is the believer's role in sanctification and what is God's role? To put it another way, is it me or is it Him? Is it faith or is it effort? Is it trust or is it obedience?

Now the same question comes up in other elements of theology. You can ask the question about salvation. When you were saved, was it you or was it God? You say, "Oh, it was all of God." Does that mean you just one day said, "God, do whatever You want to me, I'm ready?" No, you had to turn from your sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and place your faith in Him. And there are many many calls in the Bible to the sinner to repent, to believe, to commit himself to Christ. So it really was all of you, it was a total change of direction for you and for me to turn from sin to God through Christ. It was a change in our belief. It was a change in our view of sin. It was really taking my life and putting it all in the hands of Christ and yet it was all of Him. That's the same somewhat difficult to understand tension.

And then you look at the person of Christ and you ask the same question, is He God or is He man? And the answer is yes. He is 100 percent God, 100 percent man. You say, "I don't understand that." You don't have to understand it, it doesn't mean it isn't true. You see, not all truth is understandable to you, if it was you would be equal to God. God does have some things which He contains within the truthfulness of His person that you can't understand, and neither can I. And I'm glad for that because that means God is a lot smarter than I am and that's the kind of God I want, not one like me. Take a Bible book, take Philippians and ask yourself a question, who wrote Philippians, God or man? What you say is every word is out of the heart of Paul, every word is out of the vocabulary of Paul, every word is expressing what Paul wants to say and yet every word is from the Holy Spirit. You have the same situation, it's all of Paul and all of his heart and all of his passion and all he wanted to say but every word is right from the mind of the Spirit of God. You deal with the same thing.

So when you come to this matter of sanctification or spiritual growth or spiritual progress and you ask the question, is it me or is it God, you're really at the same nexus of theological discussion that you are in many other areas. In fact, John Murray says that in every major doctrine in the New Testament there is an apparent paradox which cannot in and of itself be resolved in the mind of man. So when we come to this matter of sanctification, is it an either/or, is it either God or me, do we have to take one or the other.

Now let's look for a moment at those sort of poles. The view that this lady affirmed has traditionally been called the view of quietism. In other words, the believer is quiet. The believer is passive. You could almost call it spiritual passivism. You just fall into passivity. You let go and let God. One of their little bywords was, "I can't, He can."

The other view is called pietism because it is a diligent effort toward personal piety. So you have quietism on the one hand, where you're passive. You have pietism on the other hand where you're active, aggressive and you're working on your spiritual life and doing everything within your power to live out your Christianity.

Now just a little bit of background. Quietism is somewhat mystical, somewhat subjective. And originally was popular primarily among the Quakers and then became a part of some of the Arminian perfectionists who believed you could actually come to a post-conversion crisis experience in which you became momentarily so totally surrendered to God that you would never sin again. They believed that the work of sanctification does not involve any effort on our part except surrender. In fact, they say that our striving effort is a hindrance to the process of sanctification and we've got to get self out of there, we've got to die to self, we've got to crucify self, we've got to put self on the altar...and we've all heard those messages about putting your life on the altar, crucifying yourself and so forth. And they say our proper role is to surrender to God and let Him give us a life of victory over sin. We give our life to God, He moves in, He lives in us, He produces victory. One of their old quietistic hymns went like this, "Holiness by faith in Jesus, not by effort of my own." I'm passive.

And the implication here is that the Christian chooses a life of faith and trust and says no to a life of effort and obedience as such. And they appeal to a particular phrase out of context, Galatians 2:20, "Not I but Christ." By the way, that verse maintains the tension, "For I am crucified with Christ," Paul says, "nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." He was in the same tension. It's I live, yet it's Christ lives. The quietist just says, "Not I but Christ," trying to eliminate that balance.

One of their perhaps most popular writers is a man named Trumble(?). Just to give you a little bit of insight into this view so that you'll be able to recognize it when you see it, Trumble writes this, "The simple fact is that whenever a life that trusts Christ as Savior is completely surrendered to Christ as Master...which they see as a post-conversion crisis experience...Christ is then ready to take complete control of that life and at once to fill it with Himself. When we surrender and trust completely, we die to self and Christ can and does literally replace ourself with Himself. Thus it is no longer we that live but Christ lives in us as His person, literally fills our whole being with Himself in actual personal presence. And He does this not as a figure of speech but just as literally as that we fill our clothes with ourselves," end quote.

In other words, he is saying that you come to this surrender point and you literally divest yourself of yourself and Christ becomes the new self. And now it's almost like an incarnation kind of thing. He goes on to say, "In this condition a Christian does not even experience temptation for it is defeated by Christ before it has time to draw him into a fight." And I would have to question what "him" is left to drawn into a fight if Christ has become the very life of the believer. But you understand the point. You just sort of die and surrender and put your life on the altar. You flop in a spiritual act of passiveness. Christ fills you up, lives His life through you. Everything then depends on Him. And to go so far as to say a Christian doesn't even experience temptation because it's defeated by Christ before it has time to draw him into a fight is then to force the question...well in the event that that Christian does sin, whose fault is it? Right? Whose fault is it? If I surrendered my life to Christ and in that moment of surrender He came to live His life through me, and if He is living His life through me

and I sin, whose fault is it? It can't be my fault, I surrendered. But it can't be God's fault because God is not the author of sin. It's never His fault.

And so what they say is this, "Well, you took yourself off the altar. You de-surrendered. You left the place of surrender by which you placed yourself in God's hands." But that doesn't answer the question...how could I be tempted to do that if He's in control of everything? If I surrendered my life to Christ and He's living His life through me then how could I ever sin? How could I ever not surrender if I surrendered once and He's now in charge, then He's in charge and He's going to prevent that because He's not going to sin.

They have had to come up with some ingenious analogies to sustain this particular doctrine. One of those who has articulated it perhaps as well as anybody in the movement is a woman by the name of Hannah Smith, some of you may have read her book, *The Christian Secret of a Happy Life*. Many Christians have read it. In it she gives an analogy to help you understand this surrendered life. She writes, "What can be said about man's part in this great work but that he must continually surrender himself and continually trust. But when we come to God's side of the question, what is there they may not be...what is there that may not be said as to the manifold and wonderful ways in which He accomplishes the work entrusted to Him. It is here that the growing comes in...and here's her analogy...the lump of clay could never grow into a beautiful vessel if it stayed in a clay pit for thousands of years, but when it is put into the hands of a skillful potter, it grows rapidly under his fashioning into the vessel He intends it to be. And in the same way the soul abandoned to the working of the heavenly potter is made into a vessel unto honor, sanctified and meek for the Master's use," end quote.

So she says there's the perfect analogy. You're clay and the potter does everything, all you do is set the lump of clay down, you just climb up and get on the wheel, sit there and he'll make you into what he wants you to be, you have no part. Well the question you want to ask her is, "Well then what happens when a believer sins? What happens? Whose fault is it?" To which she responds, "When a believer sins that means that the believer took himself out of the hands of the heavenly potter."

Now wait a minute, this is some kind of clay? It's jumping up on the wheel and then it's jumping back off again. The analogy breaks down at that particular point. If the Christian at one moment in the moment of crisis surrendered is a piece of malleable clay, completely soft and without any will of its own and it places itself under the total care of the Lord and the Lord is doing all the shaping, how in the world then can in the next moment that same piece of clay decide to jump out of the potter's hand? That's some kind of clay.

So you can see that in that view there are some very difficult issues. If I give my life to Christ and He's now living it all through me and I'm passive, then the problems are going to have to be laid at His feet.

Now that brings us to just a brief consideration of the other view, the pietism view. Pietism is usually connected with a movement in eighteenth century Germany which was a right reaction to the dead orthodoxy of the Lutheran church. It had many admirable features, by the way, the Pietistic Movement was a strong emphasis on Bible study, on holy living, on practical Christianity, spiritual exercises, self-discipline. They took the very opposite view of the quietist. Said the Christians have got to be involved with all his faculties and all his abilities and all his members and his mind and his heart and his soul in the matter of pursuing godliness. It takes everything you are all the time to pursue it. It stressed the need for good works. It stressed the need for usefulness. It stressed the fact that if there was a belief that didn't lead to works, it was not a saving belief. They would come on a verse like 2 Corinthians 7:1, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God," and say this is our task, this is our duty.

And for the most part I don't think that the Pietists were...were really out of balance. But that pietistic view can get out of balance because it can become an over-emphasis on self-effort. And you know what an over-emphasis on self-effort does, if you believe that all your spiritual progress is based on your ability to dedicate yourself and discipline yourself and move yourself in the right direction, then you're going to experience two things: one, when you succeed you'll have pride; two, when you fail you'll have despair. You'll have pride because you take all the credit. You'll have despair because if you're the only resource, where you going to go now? So you've got to deal with that.

Now an over-emphasis on the quietistic viewpoint--God does it all, I flop--is problematic. Now you've got a problem with what are you doing to do with your sin? You're going to blame it on God because He's in control. On the other hand, an over-emphasis on the pietistic view which says "I've got to do it all, so when I do it well I get the glory, when I fail, I am miserable because I've got nowhere to turn." There is a balance. And I believe the balance is found in this passage. It is found in this passage.

Now with that in mind, let me read these two verses to you. "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 own salvation with fear and trembling." Did you hear that? Work out your own salvation. You say, "That's...Paul is definitely a Pietist. He's a Pietist, he says it." Look at verse 13, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." And you say, "No, something happened between verse 12 and 13, he became a quietist. He's got you doing it in verse 12, and he's got God doing it in verse 13."

Now how we going to understand this? It shouldn't shock us, it really shouldn't. It's not a new concept. It's not a new concept. You say, "Work out your own salvation," turn right around and say, "For it's God working in you." It's not new, let me show you something. First Kings and I wanted to show you this because I think it's important for you to see the sweeping character of this particular issue and particular principle. It is very very important to understand this. Look at 1 Kings chapter 8

verse 54, here you have Solomon in his dedicatory prayer and speaking to the people of Israel. They have dedicated the place that had been built for the worship of God, the temple. And in verse 54 we start to see Solomon speaking to the people after he has finished his prayer. It says, "It came about that when Solomon had finished praying this entire prayer and supplication to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord for kneeling on his knees with his hands spread toward heaven, he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice saying," now I want you to follow this, this is his speech, "Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised, not one word is failed of all His good promise which He promised through Moses, His servant. May the Lord our God be with us as He was with our fathers, may He not leave us or forsake us."

Now we'll look at verse 58. "That He may incline our hearts to Himself." You ought to underline that. "That He may incline our hearts to Himself in order that we might walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances which He commanded our fathers." In other words, if we're going to be obedient, who is going to have to make us obedient? God. He says, "I am pleading with God to incline our hearts to Himself." That's...that's a man who is saying our ability to obey is built on God moving our hearts toward Him. In other words, it's a divine work.

Verse 59, "And may these words of mine with which I have made supplication before the Lord be near to the Lord our God day and night and that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel as each day requires so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God, there is no one else." Now look at verse 61, "Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the Lord our God." Underline that. You say, "What's that saying?" That's the very opposite side. In verse 58 he says, "O God, we depend on You inclining our hearts to Yourself." In verse 61 he says to the people, "You let your heart be wholly devoted to the Lord our God to walk in His statutes, to keep His commandments," the same result.

So if you were standing there that day and you were listening to Solomon and somebody came to you afterwards and say, "Well, tell me about spiritual living...tell me about holiness, how does it happen? Is it something that we do or something that God does?" You'd say, "Yes...yes." We pray, "O God, incline our hearts to You." And then we exhort, "You better wholly devote your heart toward God." Really not a new principle in Philippians, is it?

Let me show it to you again. First chapter of 2 Peter...the first chapter of 2 Peter in verse 3. He has just talked about God and our Lord Jesus and he speaks about the Lord's divine power and in verse 3 he says, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness." You say, "Oh, Peter is definitely a quietist. He says it, everything related to life and godliness is God's gift to us, His divine power does it all. It was by His divine power that we literally were saved, that we became partakers, verse 4, of the divine nature, that we escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." You say it's all of God. All things pertaining to life and godliness come from God.

But look at verse 5. "Now for this very reason you should apply all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence and in your moral excellence knowledge, and in your knowledge self-control and in your self-control perseverance and in your perseverance godliness and in your godliness brotherly kindness and in your brotherly kindness love." In other words, he says you better be diligent to produce all those things.

You say, "Now wait a minute. He's a quietist in verse 3, he's a Pietist in verse 5 and following." Same issue. He says it's all of God on the one hand, it takes everything you've got on the other hand. Same thing Solomon said, same thing that Paul says.

Now with that in mind, let's go back to Philippians 2 and look at the text and just introduce the first concept. And the question we're posing is, what is the believer's role in sanctification and what is God's role? Two points in this outline, the Christian working out, God working in. The Christian working out, verse 12, God working in, verse 13. Let's talk about the Christian working out and at least introduce the concept without all of its wonderful detail. And may I say to you that in this verse there is so much depth and so much richness and so much potential for meaningful discussion that you could preach months on this one verse just because of its ramifications. But I want to just take the main thought of verse 12 and at least give you a sense of what it means.

Verse 12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence," here's the key verb and the key thought, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." That's the main thrust of verse 12. Work out your salvation. That's the principle. Paul says to these Philippian believers, you've got to work out your salvation. You say, "Now what does this mean?"

Lots of people have been very disturbed by that statement. Some people think that mean work for your salvation. Some people think it means work at your salvation. Some people might think it means work up your salvation. But salvation is not by works, is it? You can't work at it. You can't work for it. You can't work it up. "For by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of...what?...works lest any man should boast," Ephesians 2:8 and 9. Romans 3:21 to 24, very clear, "The deeds of the law don't justify anybody but righteousness comes by grace." No, you don't work for your salvation. There is no salvation by works. So he's not saying,

"Work for ...work at...work up your salvation," he's saying, "Work out."

What does he mean? Well, this verb is important to note. It's a present-tense imperative verb which means it is a command that has a continual emphasis...keep on continually making the effort to work out your salvation. Now what does it specifically mean? Let me see if I can help you. The verb, as far as I understand it, always means to bring something to fulfillment, to fullness or completion...to

bring something to fulfillment, to fullness or completion. And what he is saying is this, the salvation that is in you needs to be brought out all the way to its fulfillment, to its fullness. It really is a command for sustained effort and diligence in working out what has already been planted within.

That's a rich thought. And there is a secular source on this verb that kind of gives a good...a good insight. The ancient scholar Strabo was a Roman, somewhere 60 years or so before Christ. He wrote in Greek and he had an account in one of his writings that I discovered this last week which is about some mines that the Romans had in Spain. And he refers to the Romans as working out the mines, and he uses the very same verb. And what he had in mind there was that the Romans, and I think this is made clear in his writing, if I remember correctly, that the Romans owned this land, it was theirs and they were extracting out from within it all of its richness and all of its value in the mining of the silver. And that seems to be a good expression of what this word means. I am to mine out of my life what God has richly deposited there in the matter of salvation. I am to mine it out. I am to produce such precious nuggets of personal character from what God has planted in me in my salvation. I think that's the first sense in which we are to understand this verse and this command. So we could say the first aspect of it then is to work out in daily conduct what God has put in. I am to mine out what is already mine. Day-to-day holy living, that's the idea. I am to be committed to the process of my salvation coming to the outside in the sense that it's manifest in my conduct, my behavior. It's a marvelous truth.

Now there is a sense here in which we are making a great effort. I mean, the command assumes an effort. When he says "work out your salvation" he is saying you've got to do it. You've got to work it out. There's commitment. This is not a quietistic view. This is a very strong statement about personal effort. And Scripture is replete with such injunctions. I'm thinking of Romans 6:19 where Paul says, "Just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now continually present your members as slaves to righteousness resulting in sanctification."

In other words, you have the responsibility to present all your human faculties to patterns of righteousness in the process of sanctification. It's not just a flopping passive response, it's a very active aggressive pursuit of obedience, even under the conditions of being, as it were, a slave. And then the verse we mentioned earlier, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God," 2Corinthians 7:1. You have many other passages. Ephesians chapter 4, "Walk worthy of the calling to which you're called," and he details how to do that. Colossians chapter 3, you have a new life, set aside all these things, wrath and anger and so forth, don't lie to one another, don't slander, all of those injunctions imply that we have a responsibility. If it was just the yielded life, then why is he telling us to do that. If he knows to do it, he'll do it if we're surrendered. You see, all of the injunctions of Scripture presuppose the responsibility on the part of the believer. We are called to holy living on a daily basis, to work out what is in us, to bring the nuggets of the precious silver that is in us by salvation to the outside that God may be honored, that

God may be glorified.

In 1 Corinthians 9, I can't even talk about the subject without drawing your attention to 1 Corinthians 9:24 where Paul says this, see if this sounds passive, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win." That's effort, folks, that's maximum effort. "And everyone who competes in the games, engages in athletics, exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way as not without aim, I box in such a way as not beating the air." I don't shadow box and I don't run in circles. I make maximum effort to win.

Then verse 27, "And I pummel, or I punch my body and make it my slave." Now that's a lot of effort, running, boxing, punching his own body, giving it a knockout punch so that it conforms to the divine pattern. Tremendous effort, this is a race. Paul says in his second epistle to Timothy, "I have fought the good...what?...fight, I have finished the course." It's a battle, it's a race, it's a boxing match. He says, "Along the way we wrestle...we wrestle." He talks about the weapons of our warfare not being carnal but spiritual, the tenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. He's involved in a great effort, a great struggle.

While we're in Philippians you might want to look and see a little bit of insight into the Apostle's struggle, verse 12, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus," we'll come back to that. He's pressing, he's moving, he's running, he's fighting. Verse 13, "I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead I press on to the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." I'm pressing, I'm moving, I'm disciplined, I'm under control and making maximum effort. If I have to, I beat my body into subjection, I protect my mind, I get my members to conform to the divine standard. Tremendous commitment, tremendous effort.

In 1 Timothy chapter 4, do you remember verse 15? "Take pains with these things," Paul says to young Timothy, "be absorbed in them so your progress may be evident to all." Take pains in the spiritual elements of life. Chapter 6 verse 12, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of the eternal life to which you were called." Strong language.

Now listen carefully. Those last two passages that I read you transition us into the second dimension of working out your salvation. The first dimension is to live on the outside what God has done on the inside, to pursue godliness, piety, holiness, obedience in your life on the outside. But the second thing is this, this verb, as I said, always means to bring something to completion. And I believe that inherent in working out your salvation, and maybe this is the more dominant thought, is that you pursue the full and final expression of salvation, even your glorification at the time when you meet Christ. That what he is really saying is not only work out your salvation but work on your salvation in the sense that you are working on toward that moment when you will see Christ and receive the end

of your faith, even the fullness of salvation.

See, salvation comes in three dimensions...past, present and future. Those of us who are Christians have been saved, there was a moment in time in which we were translated out of darkness into light. We left the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. We went from death to life. We went from sin to righteousness. We went from being the children of the devil to being the children of God. We were saved, our souls were saved, we were made new creations. There is also a sense in which we are being saved right now. We are in the process of being saved. What does that mean? That he is continually cleansing us from all sin. It isn't just a past act with no future implications, it's an on-going thing. So we were saved and we are being saved, that's the keeping power, and we will be saved, we are waiting for the full salvation, even the redemption of our bodies. That's why Paul in Romans 13:11 says, "Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed." What salvation? The final aspect of your salvation, it comes in three dimensions.

What then is he saying? I believe he is saying work your salvation out and work it out on until the time of the fullness of your salvation when you see the Lord Himself. And I really believe that that is what is in the heart of Paul when he says in 1 Timothy 6:12, I just read, "Fight the good fight of faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." In other words, you're called unto that final feature of salvation, lay hold of it, pursue it.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. Are we supposed to pursue that? I thought we were eternally secure." That's right. The Bible teaches eternal security, but it also teaches the responsibility of the perseverance of the saints. Have you heard that? And you're back to that same apparent paradox. Who wrote the Philippians? God and Paul. When you were saved was it God or was it you? It was all God and it was all of you committing yourself. And Jesus is all God and all man. And the Christian life is all of me and all of Him. And my guarantee of eternal life is all of God's power in securing me and all of perseverance energized by the Spirit of God within me that moves toward that day. You have the same two things going along side by side. So Paul says to Timothy, "Look, you need to take hold of the eternal life to which you were called."

Back in verse 16 of the fourth chapter, I read you verse 15, "Pay close attention to yourself and your teaching, persevere in these things for as you do this will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." Yes, I believe that the Christian is secure. I believe we can see eternal security in Romans 8. But I don't believe eternal security exists apart from the perseverance of the saints. True believers work out their salvation on the outside with continuity until the time when they're glorified.

Just to give you a little more feeling for that wonderful concept of perseverance, in Matthew chapter 24 the Lord says, "The one who endures to the end shall be saved." In Acts chapter 13 and verse 43 we read another of the same kinds of thoughts, it says in verse 43, "Now when the meeting of the

synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and the God fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who speaking to them were urging them...listen to this...to continue in the grace of God." In chapter 14 of Acts verse 22, it says that Paul was strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith.

You say, "Well now wait a minute, if they're genuinely saved won't they continue in the faith?" God will keep them from their side but they must persevere...from His side, rather, but they must persevere from theirs. From God's view He holds them, from man's view there must be perseverance. In Romans chapter 2 and verse 7 it says, "To those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, God gives eternal life." In other words, God gives eternal life to those who persevere. So you believe, the salvation goes in, then you work that salvation out, persevering all the way to the end.

In Colossians 1, I've read this so many times to you in past studies, it says in verse 23 that you are saved if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel. And the writer of Hebrews so frequently discusses this issue. Chapter 3 verse 14, "We have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance, firm until the end." And perhaps most significantly chapter 10 verse 38, "But my righteous one shall live by faith and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him but we are not of those who shrink back to destruction but of those who have faith to the persevering of the soul."

Now when Paul says work out your salvation, he is saying get on the outside what is on the inside. And not only that in the moment but with continuity, continually doing that you will literally work your salvation to its ultimate completion and fulfillment.

Go back to chapter 3 of Philippians and we'll look one final time at Paul's writing there. This will be helpful to you. Philippians chapter 3, look at this. In verse 7 he says that I counted all things as lost for the sake of Christ. I count all things, verse 8, to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. He's saved, no question. Christ Jesus, my Lord. He knows. He's saved. No question about it.

But look at verse 10. And he says this, "I want to know Him better, I want to know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death. I want to be more like Him. I want to know the fullness of His person, the fullness of His power, the fullness of His presence. I even want to share in His passion." And then he says a strange thing in verse 11, "In order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Don't you already have that? Didn't you get that when you were saved? Yes, but I must persevere to the end in faith. And he says it in verse 12, "Because I have...I have not already obtained it, I haven't gotten to the resurrection. I haven't already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may...here it is...lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." What a convoluted statement to the human mind. You're trying to

lay hold of something for which God laid hold of you. Boy, that's strange. What you're saying is, "I'm trying to attain what God gave me." Very strange.

But it points up again that this matter of salvation in all of its elements is all of God and all of me. You say, "I don't understand that." No, I don't understand it either. I don't have to understand it, it's just true. All I need to understand is that it takes all I am. And when anything good happens, it's all His credit.

So, he says, "Brethren," verse 13, "I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet." The fullness of salvation I haven't yet experienced, but I'll tell you, I forget the things that are behind and I reach forward to what lies ahead and I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. I am persevering with everything in my being for the day when I'm called up to be with Christ.

And we all have to have that attitude, he says in verse 15. As many of us as are perfect, here he uses the word "perfect" in the sense of saved, as many of us as are right with the Lord through Christ, we have to have this attitude, we have to persevere. We have to keep moving toward that day.

So what has Paul been saying in our text when he says work out your salvation? He means work on to the outside what God has put on the inside and continue faithfully to live the Christian life all the way to the end until the upward call. That's his command. Now that's effort...that's effort. That's the Christian working out. But that's only half the story, folks. In fact, it's a third of the story because there's a lot more left in verse 12. I don't want you to go away and say, "MacArthur said it's all us." No, don't say that. That's why I say you have to be here next week because you need to get the whole picture. This is so profound, wait till you get to verse 13, so thrilling. But we commit what God has given us this morning to the work of the Spirit in our hearts. Let's pray.

Father, thank You this morning for these wonderful moments that we've spent in Your precious truth. Lord, protect us from the imbalance that commonly occurs in so many places, in so many people's minds. Help us to take the injunction of this morning to work out our salvation, to make the maximum effort to work out our own salvation, to work on the outside what is on the inside, knowing that we have been called to press, to run, to fight, to wrestle, to box, to even harness all of our members, all the factors of our humanness in order that we might diligently and zealously pursue godliness. And yet, Lord, help us to know that just as our salvation depended on our faith and our repentance, it was still all the work of God. And just as the Scripture bears the imprint of the human author, it is all the Word of God. And just as Jesus was in every sense fully man yet He was fully God. And just as we are secure in the power of heaven, we have an anchor in heaven that steadfastly anchors us and there never will be condemnation against us, still we must persevere, but through all our persevering we are merely laying hold of that for which we have been laid hold of by God. And, Lord, we'll never understand this, perhaps even after we see You face to face, but we believe it and so we commit

ourselves afresh this day to with great zeal discipline our lives to be lived in a way that will honor Your name. We will not flop passively. We will aggressively and actively pursue godliness to be like Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2012 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).