

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

God at Work in You, Part 2

Scripture: Philippians 2:12

Code: 50-20

Will you open your Bible now with me to Philippians chapter 2, as we continue in our study of this great epistle. We have found our way to verses 12 and 13 of this great second chapter. And we began a look at these two verses last week. We will continue it this week, and we will complete it next week. The richness of what is in this tremendous text demands our careful thought.

You know, everything in life, basically, that is accomplished demands energy. It took energy for you to get out of bed this morning. It took energy for you to produce whatever you ate for breakfast. It took energy for you to get here by whatever means of transportation you took. Everything moves by virtue of energy. That's true in the spiritual dimension as well. And we've been looking at the question related to this particular passage: what is the energy that provokes sanctification? What is the energy that provokes a life of holiness? What is the energy that impels righteousness? What is the energy that causes fruitfulness? What is the energy that results in spiritual progress? And we've been looking at that very important question because that's exactly what the apostle Paul treats in these two verses.

You'll remember last week we suggested to you that there have been two answers to the question in part. Some say that the energy for spiritual progress is all God's. In fact, historically those people are called quietists. They believe that in effect the Christian is quiet in the process of spiritual growth. He provides, or she provides basically no energy to the process whatsoever and that the key is surrender, yield, die to self, mortify oneself, put your life on the altar. That we basically do absolutely nothing, it's all of God. There is also a group of people who came to be known as the Pietists who took the opposite view, in some sense, to the Quietists and they said, "No, spiritual progress is energized by the believer. We must be devout, we must be committed, we must be diligent, we must be," and here was their key word, "self and spiritually disciplined. It takes all of our effort to accomplish sanctification."

We noted last week that if we read only verse 12, we might think that Paul was a Pietist. If we read only verse 13 we might think he was a Quietist. So, we'll read both and we'll see the truth. "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." That sounds somewhat like the Pietists: work out your own salvation. It's up to you, he seems to be saying. Then, in verse 13 he says, "For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Verse 13 sounds just the opposite. It sounds as if it is all God, willing and doing whatever He wants in you.

Now, having read those two verses and considered the two opposite views, we might conclude that this is a rather complex issue to resolve. And that is not the case. Paul resolves it very simply. He says in verse 12 it's all you, and in verse 13 it's all God. What he doesn't do is harmonize it. Very simply, it takes all that we are and all that God is. Simply, it demands that I make commitment of my life daily to the service of Jesus Christ with every faculty that I possess, and at the same time all that is accomplished within me is the work of God. The answer is: it's all of us and it's all of God.

We shouldn't be surprised to find this mysterious paradox in the matter of sanctification; we find it in a lot of other ways as well in the Scripture. If we go back, for example, to the matter of incarnation, we are struck with the mystery of the fact that Jesus Christ was Son of Man, fully man, and that everything He accomplished in His life He did as man. He spoke with a voice of a man, He walked with the feet of a man, He did miracles with the hands of a man, He thought with the mind of a man, He saw with the eyes of a man, He heard with the ears of a man, He felt with the heart of a man. And yet, at the same time, He was all God. He was the God-Man, the unfathomable union of deity and humanity with no loss to either. We are not surprised also to find the same mysterious paradox in the matter of inspiration. We understand, for example, that Philippians was written by the apostle Paul. It's his vocabulary, it's his heart, it's his mind, it's his thoughts, it's his reasonings, his logic, his passion, his concern. It's all of Paul, and yet every word is inspired by the Holy Spirit. How can it be? But it is.

We have the same situation as we think about salvation. Salvation demands turning from sin and embracing the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation demands an act of the human will in which the sinner repents, places faith in the persona and work of Christ. And yet, it's all of God who chose Him before the foundation of the world and effected that salvation through sovereign grace. We find the same thing in the perseverance of a believer. We are eternally secure because we are held with Christ in the hand of God, because God has so designed it that no one can bring an accusation against us, God will not hear it. No one can condemn God's elect. It is God that justifies. It is Christ that stands for us. And yet though it is all God in terms of our security, it is all us in terms of our perseverance. And the Bible says that if we are not faithful to continue to the end, we shall not inherit eternal life. It takes all of us and all of God, and therein is the divine paradox repeated in many, many different ways.

And so, when we come to this matter of sanctification or spiritual life, we are not surprised to find out it is all of us and all of Him. We also shouldn't be surprised because this is not the first time such a truth has been said in Scripture. First Corinthians chapter 15 might be a place to start, looking at a couple of other passages briefly. Listen to this, 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 10, Paul says, "But by the grace of God I am what I am," and he's speaking spiritually there, speaking not only about his salvation but his spiritual development. "By the grace of God I am what I am at this moment, as a Christian, as a teacher of God's truth, as a called apostle, I am what I am by God's grace. And His

grace toward me did not prove useless. God has made me what I am.”

Now, that would sound at first like Paul was a Quietist. But then he says this, “But I labored even more than all of them.” In other words, there is a reality here that he is what he is because God made him what he is, but he is what he is because he worked harder at it than anybody else. And then, he closes the verse by going back to where he started and saying, “Yet not I but the grace of God with me.” I am what I am because God’s grace made me this way, but also because I labored more than all the others. In other words, he is saying I have reached the level of spiritual development that I have because of God and because of my own effort.

Look with me at Galatians chapter 2 and here we find Paul giving testimony again to the same thing. He says this in verse 20 of Galatians 2, a very familiar text, “I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.” Now, this is a favorite verse of the Quietistic view, the Keswicks, the deeper life, the higher life folks. I have been crucified with Christ therefore I’m dead. When you’re crucified, you die. So, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. In other words, Paul seems quite Quietistic at this point. He is, in effect, saying, it’s not me’ it’s Christ. Whatever life I live I’m dead to it, Christ lives it.

Then, having said that he says this, “And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me.” In the first half of the verse he said I died, Christ lives. In the second half he says but I live, Christ living in me. And again, if you read only the second half you might conclude that he was somewhat Pietistic. The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith. He doesn’t live and then he does live. It’s none of him and it’s all of him. In Colossians, as he gives us insight into the direction and ultimate goal of his ministry in chapter 1, he says in verse 28 that his objective in ministering was to admonish every man, to teach every man with all wisdom that we may present every man complete in Christ, Colossians 1:28, Paul’s goal in the ministry to present men to the Lord complete. Then, verse 29, he talks about the energy. “And for this purpose also I labor, I work hard.” A very strong verb, having to do with intense effort. It could be read, “For this purpose I make maximum effort, striving, agonizing according to His power which mightily works within me.” The same marvelous, somewhat mysterious balance. It’s all of me; it’s all of Him.

Maybe I can give you an illustration to help in your understanding. In your mind’s eye, go back to Exodus chapter 14 to Moses. You don’t need to turn to it. Just think about it with me for a moment. Pharaoh’s army is behind him and the Red Sea is blocking his path. Pharaoh’s desire is to destroy the children of Israel and the Red Sea will prove their drowning, if they move into it. But Moses was so confident, though he was in that trap, so confident that the Lord would give victory to him and to the people of God that in verse 13 of Exodus 14 he shouts to the people, and this is what he says: “Don’t be afraid, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” Don’t be afraid, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. That was great faith but that was bad advice. Sorry Moses, you got it half right. Good for that kind of faith, bad advice. Because the Lord immediately shot back from heaven and

said this, "Why are you crying unto Me? Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to go forward." I like that. It's not stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. It's what? Go forward and see the salvation of the Lord. God was going to give the victory, and He was going to give it in such a way that no one could deny that it was Him who did it. And in such a way that it could never have been done with any help from man, but He wasn't going to do it until the Israelites moved forward. What an analogy that is. Because that is precisely what Paul is saying to us here in the spiritual dimension. It isn't stand still and see the victory of the Lord. It isn't yield, surrender, let go let God. It's move, and see the victory of the Lord.

So, we conclude that there are just two points in these two verses. Point number one, verse 12: the Christian working out. Point number two, verse 13: God working in.

Let's go back to our first point which we introduced last time. In verse 12, Paul says basically that the Christian is to work out. In fact, the major statement of verse 12, the main verb and the main idea, is found at the end of verse 12, "Work out your own salvation." That is a present-imperative; that means it's a continuing force command: continually be working out your salvation. That is a mandate. Please notice, he is not saying work at your salvation. He is not saying work up your salvation. He is not saying work for your salvation. Salvation is a gift of grace not of what? Works. You're not working for it, you're not working at it to improve it, you're not working it up, you are simply working it out. And we noted last time, rather in great detail, as we studied that phrase, that what he means is to produce on the outside of your life that which has been planted on the inside, to make visible in your conduct that which is true of your redeemed nature. What God has worked in by way of salvation, you are to work out by way of sanctification. And notice, please, that he says, "Work out your own salvation." And that, by the way, is emphatic in the Greek order here. Work out your own means without me, apart from me, apart from my help. For that matter, apart from anyone else's help. There's a definite individuality in this command.

We also noted that the concept of working out your own salvation speaks of salvation in its dimensional reality. That is to say that we have been saved, we are being saved and we will be saved. There is yet a future dimension of salvation which has not yet come to pass, that full and final salvation which we will experience in the redemption of our body in the glorification when we meet Jesus Christ and become like Him. So, he is saying work out your salvation with continuity in the sense that you are working out and on to the final form of your salvation. So, we noted that he had both things in mind as we looked more closely at the terms here. Work out continually until you reach the full final expression of your salvation. He is here calling for maximum effort. The concept of work out means to give intense commitment to. He is calling for great effort.

And so, we concluded last time that we as believers must give the maximum effort to the matter of spiritual progress, occasionally beating our bodies into subjection, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27: boxing, warring, running, racing with endurance. It takes all our effort, the effort of all of our faculties.

And that is why the apostle Paul in Romans 12 says that we are to present our bodies living sacrifices and we are to allow our minds to be being transformed so that we may know and do the will of God which is always perfect. It demands the fullness of effort. The very fact that the New Testament is replete with commands to the believer assumes that the believer has both the responsibility and the resource to respond.

As I am often prone to do, I was reading last week a biography of a great man of God, it happened to be CT Studd, a portion out of his life. This man was a very gifted and unusual man who made great sacrifices in going to the mission field in a very primitive time. And one night when he and a colleague were staying in a very dilapidated facility, a very uncomfortable place and it was very cold and they had not the proper warmth, it was hard to sleep because of the discomfort that was there, his colleague awoke in the middle of the night to find CT Studd sitting up, somewhat shivering in a blanket that he had wrapped around himself, propped against two walls in the corner of this little room. And by candlelight, he was reading his Bible. And according to the biographer, his colleague asked him why he was so strangely occupied in the midst of a cold night, to which Studd replied with these words, "I felt something was wrong in my relation to the Lord, and so I am reading through the entire New Testament to check all the commands to me in case I have unwittingly violated any of them." End quote.

A rather serious approach, don't you think, to your spiritual life. Not exactly let go and let God. Here was a man so concerned about his spiritual life that he is propped up in a corner with a candle on a dark cold night, wrapped in a blanket reading the entire New Testament, if per chance he might come across some command that he has perhaps violated because there is somewhere a glitch in his relationship to the living Christ. That's the kind of devotion it takes to make a difference. That's what Paul had in mind when he said, "I labored more abundantly than them all." Yes, it is the grace of God; yes, it is a maximum effort. And what set CT Studd head and shoulders above other men of his age who name the name of Christ was not simply and only and isolated the grace of God, but it was the grace of God and the kind of devotion that keeps a man up all night reading the whole New Testament if he can find one thing that he may have violated that can enhance the fullness of his relationship with God. And so, God is calling on all of us to work out that which is in us with the greatest amount of diligence.

Now, I want to be very practical because I think Paul is here. And I want to give you the elements that will help you to do that, because he gives us five of them in this verse. Five things you need to understand that will assist you in working out your salvation with real diligence and faithfulness. Number one, you must understand your example. You must understand your example. Would you notice that verse 12 begins with a little particle in the Greek? It's translated "So then." But it's the little particle, *hste*. It is a particle used in the Greek language to draw a conclusion from a preceding section. And so, he is really pulling into those two little English words, "so then," everything that has been said from verse 5 through 11. So then, and what do we find before this? We find Jesus Christ

back in verse 5. He is introduced there as the model of humility, as the model of obedience, as the model of submission. For it was Christ Jesus who didn't hold on to being equal with God. It was Christ Jesus in verse 7 who emptied Himself, who became a bond servant. It is Christ Jesus in verse 8 who humbled Himself, even to the point of dying on a cross. It was Christ Jesus who was thereby exalted by God, who was given a name which is above every name, which we saw is the name Lord, the sovereign name.

You see, it is Christ Jesus who is the model. And he says, "So then, work out your own salvation." What do you mean, "So then?" Just as you have seen the example of what a saved person is to be like, in the light of the fact that He was obedient, be like Him. In light of the fact that He was humbled, be like Him. In light of the fact that being humbled He was then exalted, count that promise yours. So, Paul is saying since Jesus Christ gave you the example of humble obedience to God, since Jesus Christ showed you what submission is, since Christ showed you the path of exaltation, then you are to follow His pattern. Be like Him.

And I don't need to tell you this, do I? That the substance of your spiritual dedication is really clearly defined in being like Jesus Christ. That's why Paul said to the Galatians that he was in travail, or pain, until Christ was fully formed in them. That's why John says if you say you abide in Christ, you ought to walk the way He walks. He's your example. So then, work out your own salvation so that in the process you desire and long and pursue Christ's likeness.

There's a second thing you need to understand here. You need to understand you're loved. You need to understand you're loved. Do you know why? Because in the process of endeavoring to work out your salvation and be all that you can be, you're going to fail. And I don't think it's whimsical that the apostle Paul happens to say in verse 12, "So then, my beloved." There was a patience in his heart that reflected the patience of God. There was a mercy and a grace in his heart toward the people he loved and served and called his children in the faith, a patience that was representative of the patience in the heart of God. There was a mercy in Paul that was the mercy of Christ. There was a grace in Paul that was the grace of Christ. And when he says to them, "my beloved," he was saying there's some space in my relationship with you, some space for your failure.

There was Euodia and there was Syntyche and they were fighting one another. There was obviously some pride in the Philippian church; else he would not have spoken of humility so strongly. There was some discord there and disunity. But in all of it, they were still his beloved. Not just once, but back in chapter 1 verse 8 he said, "I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." This love that he had for them was a love that went from his heart down to into visceral area, as the Greek word would express it. He felt his affection. He affirms that they are his beloved again in chapter 4 verse 1, even as he speaks a corrective to them, particularly two women who were out of harmony, "Therefore my beloved brethren, whom I long for." There was deep affection. And in that love and in that affection was space for failure. And this reflects the heart of God.

Aren't you happy as a Christian that as you work out your own salvation there's some space? Aren't you happy that you are loved by God? And that within the framework of that love there is forgiveness, and there is mercy, and there is grace, and there is restoration? Aren't you glad that you don't serve the kind of God that the deities of paganism represent? Aren't you glad that you don't live under the bondage of fear to those deities who cannot be properly appeased because there is no grace? Understand you're loved. This is no abusive command. This is no indifferent military directive. This is the loving passionate heart of a pastor saying to his people, "I care about you. I understand. There's some room for failure," and thus does he reflect the heart of Christ. So, in working out your salvation, understand your example and understand that you're loved.

Thirdly, understand the place of obedience. Understand the place of obedience. He says in verse 12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed." Just as you have always obeyed. And therefore he identifies a pattern of conduct in spiritual life, very much like Ephesians 2:10 where he says that God has ordained us to walk in good works. See, the Christian life is basically a pattern of obedience. By the way, the word "obey" here is from the Greek verb *hupakou*, and the reason I mention the term is because we get the word acoustics from *akou*, it means to obey something you've heard. The little preposition *hupo* at the front means "under," having heard, put yourself under. So, it speaks of submitting to something you've heard. And he is saying basically, you have always had that attitude. You can go back to the 16th chapter of the book of Acts and you will find there that it says when Paul came to the region of Philippi, he preached the gospel and Lydia listened. She not only listened, but she believed, and it says the Lord opened her heart. And later on he preached, you'll remember, verses 32 and 33, the gospel to the Philippian jailer and his entire household, and they too listened and they too believed.

In both cases, as that church of Philippi was being born, there was obedience. You say, "In what sense?" They obeyed the word which they heard. And what is the word of the gospel? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved. The word of the gospel comes and says turn from your sin and turn to Christ. Stop following self and follow the Lord Jesus. That's a command. We don't think of it as such, but it is. The gospel is a command, do you understand that? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" is an imperative. When the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him," He was serious. God commands the world to hear Christ. Christ commands the world to believe. The apostles and the preachers command the world to believe on Christ so that any moment of salvation is a moment of obedience to a command.

We often talk about sharing our faith. We very seldom talk about commanding people to believe. We are doing more than sharing something, we are reiterating a command. "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him." Believe, repent, follow Me. That is precisely why the apostle Paul articulates apostleship as calling the Gentiles, Romans 1:5, to the obedience of faith. Faith is an act of obeying a command to repent and believe. And it then ushers one into a life of obedience so that most characteristic of a

Christian's life is obedience to God, obedience to Christ. And thus, Paul says, you have always obeyed.

Sometimes your obedience is sporadic. There are times of disobedience for which you are glad that you understand you are loved, as we just noted. But nonetheless, our spiritual life is characterized by obedience. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, do you remember verse 8, where in speaking about the retribution that will come against the ungodly when Jesus returns from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire? Paul says, "He will deal out retribution to those who do not know God," listen to this, "and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." You see, receiving Christ is an act of obedience to a divine command. And in that sense, if there were no other sense, you always at salvation are acknowledging Jesus as Lord because you in believing are submitting to a command. And that initiates a life of obedience.

In chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians and verse 14, it says, "If anyone does not obey our instruction," and Paul is there talking to believers and so we understand that though we were saved by an act of obedience into a life of obedience, it is possible for us to be disobedient. And that is why he says, "Just as you have always obeyed, I want you to do it much more," and we'll get into that statement next. So, we must understand that we are called to a life of obedience. That is the pattern of our life from the moment of salvation.

Do you remember what Peter said in 1 Peter? Just so we don't think Paul is the only one who gave this message. He says we are chosen, 1 Peter 1:2, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by the sanctifying work of the Spirit in order that you may obey Jesus Christ. That's the heart of our Christian experience. We are called to obedience. That is why in the great commission we are told to make disciples by going and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have what? Commanded you. It's a life of obedience. Salvation is a command and all of obedience is articulated in Scripture as a series of commands. The very basic definition of our spiritual life is that we are under orders to obey a commander. To fail to understand that is to fail to understand the most basic element of salvation. It is an act of obedience.

So, if we are to work out our salvation, it requires that we understand our example, Christ, so we know what we are to be like; to understand that we are loved, that we have the space to fail and be restored again in grace; to understand nonetheless that we are called to obedience.

Fourthly, Paul helps us here in this matter of working out our own salvation by letting us know that we need to understand our personal resources and responsibility. We are very prone as sinners to blame other people for our problems, is that not true? To be self-justifying. So, he reminds us here that we are responsible because we have the personal resources for our own spiritual wellbeing. Simply stated, he says this very clearly, "So then, my beloved, just as you've always obeyed, not as in my presence," *parousia*, "only but now much more in my *apousia*." In other words, he says, "Look, I saw

the pattern of obedience when I was there. I want to see much more of it now that I'm not there." The assumption here is that they need to do it on their own. That's why earlier in the verse, or later in the verse he says, "Work out your own salvation; you don't need me."

They loved him. Back in chapter 1 verses 7 and 8 it tells us that the bond of affection between them was very strong. They had, in fact, as we pointed out many months ago when we studied that section, a very unique relationship. They loved that man. There was never at that time, and perhaps never will be in the history of the church, a greater man of God than Paul. Certainly never a greater teacher of the Word of God because he was inspired in much of what he said which became a great portion of the New Testament, at least 13 letters. This is a unique man of God who could, if anyone could, build a tremendous dependency, and he did. There were some who said, as we noted in Corinth, "I am of Paul." You could become very dependent on his strength. You could almost lean on him to the point that if he moved, you fell.

But at the time he writes this letter he is incarcerated as a prisoner and he is saying to them, "In my presence you obeyed, much more you must now obey in my absence, you may not have me again." I saw it when I was there; I want to see more of it now that I'm gone. In fact, you should obey even more now that I'm gone, because you should have progressed to that point because of all that I taught you. And the point that I want you to understand is that they had the duty and the responsibility because they had the resources to work out their own salvation.

Sometimes you'll hear someone say, "Well, So-and-so is not a very strong Christian, but after all, look at the church they're in. So-and-so is not a very strong Christian, they don't get good teaching. Well, you know, So-and-so has got a lot of sin in their life but they've really never been exposed to good books, and have never had anybody disciple them." And I will say to you that I have met people in the remote corners of the world who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, and walk in spiritual depth and maturity, and may be all but absolutely alone in a sea of paganism as missionaries. But their love for Christ is deep, consistent, and powerful. And their testimony is pure and clean. Why? Because they have in them the Holy Spirit of God. It is a great boon to be in an environment where your spiritual life is stimulated, but sometimes it becomes an environment where your spiritual life is artificially propped up.

People ask me the question all the time, "What do you think would happen to Grace Church if you left?" I suppose I would like to write back a letter and say, "You obeyed in my presence, now much more in my absence also." Because it's immaterial, really in a sense, who your pastor is. That time will inevitably come when I am no longer in that place. But, there is never a moment in your spiritual life when you are not responsible for the progress because you have the resources. You must understand that. And while you can count yourself rich for being in a stimulating environment, you can't blame any of your shortcomings on the absence of such environment. There are Christians around this world who couldn't even dream of this kind of spiritual support system, and yet who would

put us all to shame in their devotion. It's a fine line between being a strength and becoming a support for your weakness.

And I understand that, and I understand how it's easy to become dependent on someone else's spiritual strength. But Paul won't allow it to happen. He says, "I want to see more obedience in my absence, even than I saw in my presence." You must be independent of your teacher. You must be independent of your pastor, your Sunday school teacher, your discipler when it comes to living your spiritual life.

Go back to chapter 1 verse 27 where he introduced this concept. He said, "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." Whether I'm around or not, that's what I want to hear. Why? Because you must understand that you have the responsibility and the resources for working out your own salvation.

So, if we as believers are going to work on the outside what we have in the inside and do it with continuity until the fullness of salvation is revealed when we see Christ, it means we have to understand our example, that is Jesus Christ. We have to understand that we are loved so we do not become despondent when we fail. We have to understand that we have been called to a life of obedience, and we have to understand that we have the responsibility because we have the resources for our spiritual development.

Fifthly and finally, there's one other thing I want you to understand, he says, and that is this: I want you to understand the consequence of sin. While there is space for you to fail, and be forgiven, and loved, you must also understand the consequence of your sin. And so, he closes the verse with this statement: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The word "fear" in the Greek, *phobos*; we get phobia from it. The word "trembling," *tromos*; we get trauma from it. Work out your salvation with phobias and traumas. What is he saying here? He's saying that there should be a healthy fear in your heart of offending God. There should be a shaking. *Tromos* means a shaking. There should be a shaking when you contemplate the consequences of such an offense. This is a proper reaction. It's a proper reaction to our weakness and our inadequacy. It's a healthy anxiety to do what is right. Fear means godly awe, growing out of recognition of our weakness and the power of temptation. Did you get those two things? It grows out of the fear of our weakness and the fear of the power of temptation. It's a healthy fear that puts you on guard so that you don't stumble and lose your joy, so that you don't offend the one you supremely love, so that you don't violate your testimony to an unbelieving world, so that you don't negate your usefulness in the body of Christ and ministry there. Fear and trembling is a proper reaction to our weakness and the power of temptation.

God is desirous of that. In fact, I read you in Psalm 111 what is in Proverbs many times, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." But listen to what it says in Isaiah 66. This is from the Lord,

“Thus says the Lord,” verse 1, “heaven is My throne, the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me?” What are you going to do for Me? What are you going to contain Me in? What are you going to offer Me? What do I need that you can give Me? What do I want from you? “For My hand has made all these things, thus all these things came into being, declares the Lord.” Then, He says this, “What do I want from you? I’ll tell you what I want. To this one I look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit and who trembles at My Word.” You want to know what I’m looking for? You want to know what you can give Me? You can tremble at My Word. Verse 5 says, “Hear the Word of the Lord, you who tremble at His Word.” That becomes, then, really a title for a believer, a trembler at God’s Word. Do you tremble at God’s Word? Do you have a healthy fear of dishonoring Him because you do not want to dishonor the one you love, because you do not want to bring upon yourself chastening, because you do not want to injure your witness to the watching world, because you do not want to negate your effective ministry to the church? You see, working out our salvation is hard. It’s hard for me. It’s hard. And failure is very possible. And one of the things that retards that failure is a healthy fear: an awe, a respect of God. I’m not talking about the fear of being doomed, the fear of eternal torment. I’m not talking about an unending despair or despondency. I’m talking about a reverence that motivates.

Writing on the Proverbs, Wardlaw wrote these words and I think the paragraph is very instructive. He says, “This fear is self-distrust. It is tenderness of conscience. It is vigilance against temptation. It is the fear which inspiration opposes to high-mindedness in the admonition, be not high-minded but fear. It is taking heed lest we fall. It is a constant apprehension of the deceitfulness of the heart and of the insidiousness and power of inward corruption. It is the caution and circumspection which timidly shrinks from whatever would offend and dishonor God and the Savior.” End quote. And Solomon said in a strange conundrum, “Happy is the man who fears.” That’s interesting, isn’t it? Whatever kind of fear it is, it’s the kind that makes you happy. It’s a holy, healthy awe.

We, as those who name the name of Jesus Christ, who say we belong to God need to fear God. Fearing God simply means that I don’t want to offend Him. And I know He is holy and as a holy reaction against sin, I don’t want to do anything to offend Him, I don’t want to do anything that cause Him to chasten me, I don’t want to do anything to cause me to lose my testimony to the world. I don’t want to do anything to cause me to lose my effectiveness to the church. And so, I live in the fear of sin. Why do I fear sin? Because I am weak in my flesh, because temptation is powerful, and because I don’t want to offend God.

In order to have that fear, you have to do more than acknowledge that you’re a sinner. In order to have that fear, your mind must be filled with a deep and settled conviction that sin is great offense against God. And if you really love God, it would be impossible not to repent, because you would have to repent if you had sinned against the one you supremely loved. You’d be compelled. And I guess we could say that a true Christian is the depth of genuine spiritual devotion not only hates his sin, but in a sense hates himself for his sin and says, “O wretched man that I am.”

It's one thing to mourn for sin because it exposes you to chastening. It's another thing to mourn for sin because it offends God. It's one thing to be terrified; it's something else to be humbled. And God is calling us to have a holy fear of sin and to understand its seriousness.

So, how are we going to work out our salvation? Well, look at the example, remember your love, remember your call to obedience. Very basic. Remember that you're responsible because you have the resources within you and understand the consequence of your sin toward God, toward yourself, toward the church, toward the unbelieving world. With all that in mind, make a supreme effort to work out your own salvation. Now, let me tell you something, folks, that's all for today. That's only one half. You've got to be here next week when we talk about God working in you. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we have ringing in our hearts still the example of that dear missionary who sat in a corner, huddled in a blanket with a candle reading the whole New Testament in the middle of a dark cold night to find if there is one thing he had done to violate Your law. O God, give us that kind of zeal. Help us to know that the reason the apostle Paul was used so mightily was not just the grace of God, but that he labored more than all the rest. Help us, Lord, to be all you want us to be. And we await with such eagerness the next Lord's day when we can see the means by which this can happen as You work in us. And Father, do that work even now in every heart.

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