

"With Fear, Work Out Your Salvation"
(Philippians 2:12-13)

Introduction: Have you ever heard of the expression: Let go and let God? What do you think is meant by it? Does this mean that we are to let go of our lives and let God direct us? Does this mean that we put our lives on some kind of automatic pilot and then God will accomplish everything He wants through us? And does that mean that, once letting go we then do nothing, that that is God's will? Is this your view of the Christian life?

The Bible does tell us that God is absolutely sovereign in the act of salvation. That is, when God comes to us, He finds us completely unable to come to Him and unwilling to receive His free grace as offered in the Gospel. And so if God is to bring us unto salvation, He must first quicken us by His Word and Spirit, and give to us the desire to come. If He does not, then we are as powerless to come as a car without gasoline is powerless to run, or an electric blender is powerless to blend without being plugged into the wall. But God plugs us into Christ, as it were, and enables us, gives us the ability, and the desire, to come to Him. Regeneration, the new birth, is the sovereign act of God. But once the life of God has been turned on in our lives, the responsibility to believe on Christ, and to be obedient to His commandments becomes ours.

Last week, Paul gave to us the greatest example of humility that has ever taken place in history, namely the humiliation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who was the most high and exalted God of all the universe, humbled Himself by taking upon Himself the form of a mere creature, and then gave Himself over to the consequences of the sins of His people and died the death of the cursed. Paul held this infinite condescension forth as an example, that you might have the same attitude within yourselves to be the servant of all. This week, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, is giving to us another exhortation based upon this great work of Christ for our salvation, namely to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. And what the Spirit is saying to the church this morning is this,

After God's work of the new birth, there is still the very real obligation upon us to persevere in the faith.

- I. *First, I Want You to Notice Paul's Command to Work Out Your Salvation with Fear and Trembling.*
 - A. *Salvation Is From First to Last of God, But There Are Differing Senses in Which the Word Salvation Is Used in Scripture.*
 1. *Yes, salvation defined as the work of redemption is the sovereign work of God in history.*
 - a. *The eternal counsel of God to redeem fallen man has existed from all eternity in His mind.*
 - b. *The person and work of the coming Redeemer was foreshadowed in history through the many types of Christ, such as in Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant; in David, the one who fulfilled the offices of prophet, priest, and king; and in the tabernacle, the temple, and the many sacrifices.*
 - c. *This redemption was actually accomplished when the Son*

of God took upon Himself the form of sinful flesh, and in that nature, earned a perfect standing for His people, and suffered and died in their place.

- d. And it was and is sovereignly applied by the Spirit of God who works when and where He wills, breathing into the souls of God's elect the life of Christ.
- e. In this sense, the salvation of a soul is from first to last the work of God.

2. But that is not always what the Bible is speaking of when it uses this term.

- a. Sometimes it refers to safety from some physical danger.
 - (i) Noah, out of obedience to God, built an ark to save his family from the coming flood, "BY FAITH NOAH, BEING WARNED BY GOD ABOUT THINGS NOT YET SEEN, IN REVERENCE PREPARED AN ARK FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS HOUSEHOLD, BY WHICH HE CONDEMNED THE WORLD, AND BECAME AN HEIR OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS ACCORDING TO FAITH" (Heb. 11:7).
 - (ii) When the sailors on board the ship that was carrying Paul to Rome had not eaten for fourteen days because of their anxiety, Paul told them, "THEREFORE I ENCOURAGE YOU TO TAKE SOME FOOD, FOR THIS IS FOR YOUR PRESERVATION (SALVATION); FOR NOT A HAIR FROM THE HEAD OF ANY OF YOU SHALL PERISH" (Acts 27:34).
- b. It also refers to being delivered from some dangerous disease, "AND WHENEVER HE ENTERED VILLAGES, OR CITIES, OR COUNTRYSIDE, THEY WERE LAYING THE SICK IN THE MARKET PLACES, AND ENTREATING HIM THAT THEY MIGHT JUST TOUCH THE FRINGE OF HIS CLOAK, AND AS MANY AS TOUCHED IT WERE BEING CURED/BEING SAVED" (Mark 6:56).
- c. It can also refer to being brought safely through the birthing process, "BUT WOMEN SHALL BE PRESERVED (SAVED) THROUGH THE BEARING OF CHILDREN IF THEY CONTINUE IN FAITH AND LOVE AND SANCTITY WITH SELF-RESTRAINT" (1 Tim. 2:15).
- d. And of course, as we've already said, it refers to the salvation of a soul from danger, not only in time past, but throughout life, and in the life to come.
- e. Christ has saved us by His blood; by His Spirit we are being kept **for** a salvation ready to be revealed; and He will keep us **from** danger throughout all eternity.

B. Here, Paul Is Exhorting Us to Work Out Our Salvation through the Obedience Which Must Be in Our Lives unto the Consummation **of** Our Salvation, with an Attitude **of** Fear and Trembling. "JUST AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED, NOT AS IN MY PRESENCE ONLY, BUT NOW MUCH MORE IN MY ABSENCE."

- 1. One **of** the marks **of** true saving grace is a present salvation **from** bondage to sin and a persevering in righteousness.
 - a. The two **of** these must both be present at once.
 - (i) There can be no freedom from sin without a

- lifestyle of righteousness.
- (ii) If we are not doing what is right, then we are doing what is wrong, there is really no middle ground. Christ said, "HE WHO IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME; AND HE WHO DOES NOT GATHER WITH ME SCATTERS" (Matt. 12:30).
 - (iii) And there can be no doing of what is right without being freed from sin. As long as the heart is bound by the evil inclinations of the heart, there can be no proper obedience to the Word of God.
 - (iv) Jesus said, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, EVERYONE WHO COMMITS SIN IS THE SLAVE OF SIN. AND THE SLAVE DOES NOT REMAIN IN THE HOUSE FOREVER; THE SON DOES REMAIN FOREVER. IF THEREFORE THE SON SHALL MAKE YOU FREE, YOU SHALL BE FREE INDEED" (John 8:34-36).
 - (v) And so there must be a freedom from the bondage of sin, coupled with a doing what is right if there is true saving grace in the heart.

b. And where these are present, there must be a perseverance in them.

- (i) The Scripture does not hold out any assurance of salvation for a periodic turning away from sin to do apparently good works, but in the consistent walk of godliness.
- (ii) John tells us in 1 John 3:4-9, "EVERYONE WHO PRACTICES SIN ALSO PRACTICES LAWLESSNESS; AND SIN IS LAWLESSNESS. AND YOU KNOW THAT HE APPEARED IN ORDER TO TAKE AWAY SINS; AND IN HIM THERE IS NO SIN. NO ONE WHO ABIDES IN HIM SINS; NO ONE WHO SINS HAS SEEN HIM OR KNOWS HIM. LITTLE CHILDREN, LET NO ONE DECEIVE YOU; THE ONE WHO PRACTICES RIGHTEOUSNESS IS RIGHTEOUS, JUST AS HE IS RIGHTEOUS; THE ONE WHO PRACTICES SIN IS OF THE DEVIL; FOR THE DEVIL HAS SINNED FROM THE BEGINNING. THE SON OF GOD APPEARED FOR THIS PURPOSE, THAT HE MIGHT DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL. NO ONE WHO IS BORN OF GOD PRACTICES SIN, BECAUSE HIS SEED ABIDES IN HIM; AND HE CANNOT SIN, BECAUSE HE IS BORN OF GOD."

2. The professing Christian should always fear therefore, lest, giving himself over to sin to be in bondage to it, he falls from the grace of Christ.

a. We must never forget the constant warnings to the covenant community in Scripture to continue in holiness and not fall back into sin.

- (i) "FOR IF WE GO ON SINNING WILLFULLY AFTER RECEIVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH, THERE NO LONGER REMAINS A SACRIFICE FOR SINS, BUT A CERTAIN TERRIFYING EXPECTATION OF JUDGMENT, AND THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES" (Heb. 10:26-27).

- (ii) "TAKE CARE, BRETHREN, LEST THERE SHOULD BE IN ANY OF YOU AN EVIL, UNBELIEVING HEART, IN FALLING AWAY FROM THE LIVING GOD" (Heb. 3:12).
- (iii) "FOR IF THE WORD SPOKEN THROUGH ANGELS PROVED UNALTERABLE, AND EVERY TRANSGRESSION AND DISOBEDIENCE RECEIVED A JUST RECOMPENSE, HOW SHALL WE ESCAPE IF WE NEGLECT SO GREAT A SALVATION?" (Heb. 2:3).
- (iv) Even the great apostle Paul did not consider himself above falling. He said, "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. AND EVERYONE WHO COMPETES IN THE GAMES 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; BUT I BUFFET MY BODY AND MAKE IT MY SLAVE, LEST POSSIBLY, AFTER I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF SHOULD BE DISQUALIFIED (REJECTED/REPROBATE)" (1 Cor. 9:24-27).
- (v) Charles Hodge has written concerning this passage, "What an argument and what a reproof is this! The reckless and listless Corinthians thought they could safely indulge themselves to the very verge of sin, while this devoted apostle considered himself as engaged in a life-struggle for his salvation. This same apostle, however, who evidently acted on the principle that the righteous scarcely are saved, and that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, at other times breaks out in the most joyful assurance of salvation, and says that he was persuaded that nothing in heaven, earth or hell could ever separate him from the love of God. Rom. 8, 38. 39. The one state of mind is the necessary condition of the other. It is only those who are conscious of this constant and deadly struggle with sin, to whom this assurance is given. In the very same breath Paul says, 'O wretched man that I am;' and, 'Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory,' Rom. 7, 24. 25. It is the indolent and self-indulgent Christian who is always in doubt" (Hodge *1 Corinthians* 169).

b. And so, what does this call you to as Christians seeking to arrive safely at Mount Zion?

- (i) You must continue in the faith, steadfastly persevering under even the most difficult trials.
- (ii) Paul met with any number of obstacles, any of which might have been sufficient for us to throw in the towel. But he persevered through them all, and God brought him safely to the finish line.

- (iii) Even so, no matter what obstacles you face, no matter how much discouragement, affliction, trial, sickness, derision from your neighbors, friends, and even brethren in the church; even if the whole church goes into heresy and moral depravity--as it almost had entirely in the days of Athanasius, when he single-handedly fought the battle of orthodoxy against the Arians, so that they wrote on his memorial stone "Athanasius against the world"--no matter what stands in your way, persevere to the end. It is the only way to be saved.
- (iv) Do not become complacent in your salvation, but have a healthy fear of becoming stagnant and falling away from the whole-hearted devotion that the Lord calls you to. Remember what Christ said to the church at Laodicea, "I KNOW YOUR DEEDS, THAT YOU ARE NEITHER COLD NOR HOT; I WOULD THAT YOU WERE COLD OR HOT. SO BECAUSE YOU ARE LUKEWARM, AND NEITHER HOT NOR COLD, I WILL VOMIT YOU OUT OF MY MOUTH" (Rev. 3:15-16).

II. *Secondly, I Want You to Realize that When You Do Persevere, It Is God Who Is Causing You to Persevere.*

A. *God Is Continually Working in You.*

1. *What is it in the life of a Christian that upholds the life of Christ in his soul, but the working of God?*
 - a. Paul said, "FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND, THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM" (Eph. 2:10). The purpose of the new creation is that we might consistently bear fruit for God's glory.
 - b. And that work which God begins in His people, he will bring to completion. Paul told us earlier in Philippians, "FOR I AM CONFIDENT OF THIS VERY THING, THAT HE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL PERFECT IT UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST JESUS" (1:6).
2. *Here Paul is saying, that this work which God does He is constantly doing without intermission.*

B. *What He Is Working in You Is the Desire to Serve Him, and the Power to Serve Him.*

1. *There must be a conjoining or a working together of both will and ability in man, if there is to be any progress made toward holiness.*
 - a. *The power to do something, without the desire, will end in an inability to do it at all.*
 - (i) A person may have the physical capability to run a three minute mile, and yet if he has no desire to do so, he will not train his body and undergo the necessary rigors to attain to that level of endurance.
 - (ii) A person may have the mental equipment to be the greatest genius in theology that the church has ever seen, and yet if his interests do not

lie there, but in some other field of endeavor, or in something other than intellectual pursuits, he will not achieve greatness in that field.

(iii) And so ability without desire will not move anyone closer to the goal.

b. *On the other hand, the desire to accomplish something without the ability to do it, will also bear no fruit.*

(i) A man who is crippled may desire to walk, but cannot unless he gains strength in his legs.

(ii) A man who is blind may desire to see, but the desire will do him no good if he is physically incapable of seeing.

(iii) Even so, the desire to do anything is not enough, unless the power to do it is also present.

2. *But God gives to His people the willingness and the ability to serve Him.*

a. *God is able and actually does communicate to His own both the desire and the power to serve Him through His Holy Spirit.*

(i) God gives to us the desire to obey Him in regeneration.

(ii) And through His ordinances, His channels of grace, which we receive by faith through the working of His Spirit, He gives to us the power to obey Him.

b. *And yet, sometimes we don't serve Him because our sin has choked out our desire to do so; it has quenched out our love for Him.*

(i) We must never forget that sin is a very real and powerful force yet within our souls that is constantly fighting against our obedience to Christ.

(ii) "FOR THE FLESH SETS ITS DESIRE AGAINST THE SPIRIT, AND THE SPIRIT AGAINST THE FLESH; FOR THESE ARE IN OPPOSITION TO ONE ANOTHER, SO THAT YOU MAY NOT DO THE THINGS THAT YOU PLEASE"
(Gal. 5:17).

c. *At other times we don't make regular enough use of His sources of grace to have the strength to serve Him.*

(i) Sin chokes out our desire to follow Him, and in doing so it keeps us from the fountain of His grace.

(ii) **As** a result, we let many things choke out our time so that we simply do not pray and read the Word.

(iii) We place our priorities in the wrong things so that we have abundant strength and time to do the things that we want to, but don't have the time and energy to spend on what is good for our souls.

- (iv) But knowing that if you don't eat or drink that you will eventually die, you eat and drink regularly to preserve your life.
- (v) And knowing of the very real and present dangers all around you by threat of disease, or personal assault, you receive inoculations and take measures to protect yourself against attack.
- (vi) If your physical life is so important to you, why wouldn't you take as much or better care of your spiritual life?
- (vii) Knowing that God's grace is necessary to sustain your soul, won't you use the means He has given to preserve it in the battle against the enemy of your souls?

d. *The Lord calls you to turn from your complacency, and renew your commitment to your first love.*

- (i) You will spend the most time with that which you love the most. Do you spend most of your time with God, in His presence?
- (ii) Cultivate that love by remembering what Christ did for you in His incarnation and atoning death.
- (iii) Remember that He loved you and died in your place on the cursed cross.
- (iv) Remember how He took you off of the broad road to destruction and placed your feet on the road to life.
- (v) Remember that He has made every provision for your needs in the physical and spiritual realm, granting to you everything pertaining to life and godliness.
- (vi) Remember that He continues to love you in heaven and constantly intercedes for you before the Father.
- (vii) Examine your hearts and see if you have not left your first love as the church at Ephesus. See if sin has quenched your desire for Him. If so, Jesus says to you, "REMEMBER THEREFORE FROM WHERE YOU HAVE FALLEN, AND REPENT AND DO THE DEEDS YOU DID AT FIRST; OR ELSE I AM COMING TO YOU, AND WILL REMOVE YOUR LAMPSTAND OUT OF ITS PLACE--UNLESS YOU REPENT" (Rev. 2:5).
- (viii) And if Jesus has never been your first love, then you must turn to Him now!

e. *Secondly He calls you to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness and make regular use of the means of grace to gain the strength which you need.*

- (i) The nourishment which God supplies through the means of grace will do you no good if you do not use them.
- (ii) And so you must discipline yourselves for the purpose of godliness. Have regular and meaningful devotions with the Lord in private and as a family. Take every opportunity to

- attend the public worship of God, to pray with the Lord's people, to hear His Word preached, and to partake of the sacraments.
- (iii) This will give you daily strength to love and serve the Lord with gladness all your days.
 - (iv) To neglect these things can either cause a vicious circle downwards, or the exercise of them can cause a gracious circle upwards.
- f. *People of God, once you have entered into the God's kingdom, the work is not finished, but only begun. To show yourself to be a true child of the King, means that you must ever be moving forward, even as a shark must continually move forward in the water or else it will die. To turn back or to remain stagnant in your Christian walk only means that you have never been found by Him. But to move forward and bear much fruit proves that you are His disciples. And so work out your salvation with fear and trembling, and know that God is working in you as you work for Him. Amen.*