

## WORK OUT YOUR GOD-GIVEN SALVATION

*2* <sup>12</sup>Therefore, my beloved ones, just as you have always obeyed, so now—not only in my presence, but much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who is working in you both to create the desire and to produce the work for the sake of his good purpose. <sup>14</sup>Do all things without grumbling and arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, <sup>16</sup>firmly holding the word of life—[and so be] a source of glory for me on the day of Christ, [showing] that I did not run in vain and I did not labor in vain. (Phil. 2:12-16)

### **Introduction**

One day a man came to the studio of the 19<sup>th</sup> century British painter, Gabriel Rossetti. The man brought with him a portfolio containing samples of his drawings. He asked the master painter for a candid evaluation of their quality.

Rossetti looked them over with his trained eye and recognized that they had no true artistic merit. In as kind a way as possible, Rossetti gave his visitor his expert evaluation of the drawings.

Then the man produced another set of sketches, and asked the great artist what he thought of them. Upon examining the second set of drawings, Rossetti recognized a remarkable talent; he predicted that without doubt that young painter could develop into a remarkably productive artist who would produce works of great value.

With a look of regret, the middle aged man who now stood in the great painter's studio confessed, "Mr. Rossetti, I was that student." The man went on to explain that he had neglected his God-given talent, he had failed to develop it, and now he had lost it.

"In my youth," confessed the man, "I was exhorted to develop my God-given talent. But I did not listen. Now I find that as the years have passed, I have slipped backward. You are right, sir, my latest drawings are of no value." (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/31/92)

In the passage of Scripture before us, we as Christians are exhorted to develop our God-given salvation. Rather than being passive and negligent about our salvation, we are called to be diligently involved in the outworking of that divine salvation.

Because it is the commandment and the expectation of God our Savior, let us be diligent to work out our God-given salvation.

## I. Work Out Your God-Given Salvation, ...with Fear and Trembling (vs. 12)

It must be emphasized that we are not being called upon to produce our own salvation; but rather to work out and develop our God-given salvation. Scripture makes abundantly clear that salvation is by God's grace, received by faith; it is not earned by means of good works done by man:

*It is by grace that you have been saved through faith—and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>it is not of works, therefore no one can boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)*

*... he saved us—not by works we ourselves performed in righteousness, but by his mercy—through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)*

*[God] saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose of grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. (2 Tim. 1:9)*

Neither are we being called upon to supplement our salvation, as though the work of Christ was inadequate; rather, we are being exhorted to work out (or develop and cultivate) our God-given salvation. Again, Scripture makes abundantly clear that the work of the Lord Jesus Christ is fully sufficient for our salvation:

*... he [Christ Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Heb. 7:25)*

*His divine power has given to us everything pertaining to life and godliness ... <sup>4</sup>so that by these things you may share in the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desire. (2 Pet. 1:3-4)*

We are called work out (or develop) our God-given salvation "*with fear and trembling.*" Our lives are to be governed by a holy fear of God, because we will give an account to Him who is the righteous Judge: "*we make it our goal to please him, ... <sup>10</sup>for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*" (2 Cor. 5:9-10.) Our lives are to be governed by a holy fear of God, because He takes pity on those who fear Him: "*Just as a father has compassion on his children, so Jehovah has compassion on those who fear him*" (Psl. 103:13.) Another reason we are to have a holy fear of God is because such an attitude of reverential fear was a characteristic of Christ's own earthly life; speaking of Jesus, the writer to the Hebrews says, "*During the days of his earthly life, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his godly fear*" (Heb. 5:7.)

Our lives are to be governed by a holy fear of God, as opposed to an unholy contempt for God. We must not assume that He does not see; speaking of the wicked, the Psalmist writes, *"There is no fear of God before his eyes, <sup>2</sup>for he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity will not be found out and be hated"* (Ps. 36:1-2.) The writer to the Hebrews informs us, *"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account"* (Heb. 4:13.) We must not assume that the LORD does not care. After listing the sins of the wicked, the LORD declares, *"These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like yourself. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face"* (Ps. 50:21.) The wicked mistakenly take God's present suspension of judgment as an indication that He does not punish sin and is as unconcerned with sin as they themselves. Neither may we assume that the LORD will "forgive." Hebrews 10:26-27 warns, *"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, <sup>27</sup>but only a fearful expectation of judgment."* The point of the passage is that we may never abuse God's forgiveness, thinking that we may continue to practice sin and still enjoy His forgiveness. He extends to us forgiveness, but at the same time calls upon us to surrender our sins to Him:

*Seek Jehovah while he may be found; call to him while he is near. <sup>7</sup>Let the wicked man forsake his way, and let the unrighteous man [forsake] his thoughts. Let him return to Jehovah, and he will have mercy on him. [Let him return] to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* (Isa. 55:6-7)

*Whoever covers his transgressions [i.e., seeks to hide them or deny them] shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy.* (Prov. 28:13)

With a holy and reverential fear, we are to apply ourselves to the task of working out our God-given salvation, as the Apostle Paul exhorts the church: *"let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* (2 Cor. 7:1.)

## **II. Work Out Your God-Given Salvation, ...because God is Working in You (vs. 13)**

The opposite of negligence in the task of working out our salvation is self-reliance. Self-reliance is a very common, but wrong, approach to living out the Christian life. The Apostle Paul found it necessary to rebuke the Galatian Christians when they were tempted to resort to self-reliance in seeking to live out the Christian life: *"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now seeking to achieve your goal by human effort?"* (Gal. 3:3) Paul rebukes the Galatians for seeking to live out and develop their Christian life *"by human effort;"* in other words, in reliance upon their own futile efforts. He reminds them that their entrance into the Christian life was *"by the Spirit;"* it was the Holy Spirit who caused them to trust in Christ for their salvation. The implication is

that the Christian life is lived out and cultivated in the same way that it is begun: by reliance upon the power and operation of the Holy Spirit.

Self-reliance is a very frustrating and futile way of seeking to live out and develop the Christian life. Consider Paul's own personal testimony:

*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature; for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup>What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing ... <sup>22</sup>In my inner being I delight in the law of God; <sup>23</sup>but I see another law at work in the members of my body (Note: "the members of my body" is a figurative term for the sinful nature that still clings to us and operates in us contrary to the new heart we have received when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior], waging war against the law of my mind and making me a captive of the law of sin at work within my members. (Rom. 7:18-19,22-23)*

Such is the Apostle Paul's own testimony as to the impossibility of living out the Christian life by our own strength and self-reliance. Paul's testimony may be illustrated as follows: Prior to conversion, our heart was a sin-producing factory; but now, as a Christian, we are under new management and committed to producing the new product of righteousness. But the old employees are sabotaging the production and seeking to prevent its distribution. We need help in getting the new product of righteousness manufactured and distributed. That help is available to us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

We must approach the task of working out our God-given salvation in reliance upon God and His Holy Spirit. *"This is the word of Jehovah: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, declares Jehovah of hosts"* (Zech. 4:6.) The LORD sets forth this as the only successful method of building and living the spiritual life to which we have been called as Christians. As the Apostle Paul informs us, *"if you live according to the sinful nature, you must die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live"* (Rom. 8:13.) The Lord Jesus declares, *"I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him, he is the one who bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing"* (Jn. 15:5.)

We must approach the task of working out our salvation with the confidence that God is completely committed to the accomplishment of His great cause in our lives. God is at work in you *"both to create the desire and to produce the work."* It is the Holy Spirit who creates in us the desire to please God. As one who has been converted unto God by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul testifies, *"in my inner being I delight in the law of God"* (Rom. 7:22;) i.e., in his renewed heart he has a love and delight in the law of God. But in describing the natural man who is still in his sins and apart from the saving work of God in his heart, Paul writes, *"the sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"* (Rom. 8:7;) i.e., the heart and mind of the natural man is

hostile to God and set against God. Furthermore, it is the Holy Spirit who produces the acts of obedience: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, integrity, <sup>23</sup>meekness, self-control"* (Gal. 5:22-23.)

God is at work in you for the accomplishment of His good purpose: *"those whom God foreknew he also **predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son**, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified"* (Rom. 8:29-30.) Note: The use of the past tense of the verbs used by the Apostle Paul in this passage indicates the certainty that God will, indeed, bring to a completion the work He has ordained to be accomplished in the lives of those He has called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ.

The certainty that God Himself is at work in us must become the motivation for our own commitment to the task of working out our God-given salvation; it must never be construed as a reason for complacency and negligence.

### III. Work Out Your God-Given Salvation, ...by "Doing All Things Without Grumbling" (vs. 14-16)

When he writes, *"Do all things without grumbling and arguing,"* the apostle is not speaking of the struggle that takes place in the Christian's life as he wrestles with accepting and doing the will of God. Note how our Lord Jesus Himself in His human nature wrestled with the matter of accepting the will of His heavenly Father. *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but your will be done. ... <sup>44</sup>And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground"* (Luke 22:42,44.) Such was our Lord's manner of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced the cross of Calvary.

What Paul is referring to that deep seated resistance and rebellion against God, which must not be carried over into our Christian life. When he uses the phrase, *"grumbling and arguing,"* Paul has in mind the Old Testament people of Israel, especially the character they displayed in the wilderness:

*But you were unwilling to go up [into the Land of Canaan]; **you rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah your God. <sup>27</sup>You grumbled in your tents and said, Jehovah hates us; that is why he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.** (Deut. 1:26-27)*

*Remember this and never forget how **you provoked Jehovah your God to anger** in the wilderness. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, **you have been rebellious against Jehovah** ... <sup>23</sup>And when Jehovah sent you out from Kadesh Barnea, he said, Go up and take possession of the land I have given you. **But you rebelled against the commandment of Jehovah your God.***

*You did not trust him or obey him. <sup>24</sup>You have been rebellious against Jehovah ever since I have known you. (Deut. 9:7,23-24)*

As a contemporary example of this rebellious spirit, consider the testimony of a young woman named Marilyn, a T.V. writer and producer: "I know You don't approve of this," I told the Lord one morning as I combed my hair before the studio mirror. "This" was an interview I was about to do that compromised my values and ethics. "But," I added, "I'm going to do it anyway!" (*POWER*, 2/9/92, pp.4-5)

It is one thing to cry out, "Oh, Lord, help me to obey!" It is quite another to quietly seethe, "Oh, Lord, I will not obey!"

We are to do all things "*without grumbling and arguing,*" so that we may become "*children of God without blemish.*" That is to say, we are to be changed into the character of Christ who exhibited unreserved obedience to His heavenly Father, note Philippians 2:8, "*he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross*" (Phil. 2:8.) We are called to become like Christ, as opposed to being like the Old Testament people of Israel, who, because of their habitual "*grumbling and arguing,*" are identified in these terms: "*they are not his children, it is their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation*" (Deut. 32:5.) Their rebellious spirit is defined as "*their blemish,*" in other words, that spirit of rebellion was a condemning mark against them.

## **Conclusion**

Let us learn a lesson from that would-be artist who possessed a God-given talent but, because he failed to develop it, he lost it. We have received a God-given salvation; and, in reliance upon God, it is our solemn duty and calling to develop that salvation, to work it out in our lives. Salvation is all of grace, and we are required to employ that grace to develop and cultivate that salvation.