

## **SALVATION WORKED OUT WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING**

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"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Phil. 2:12, 13

There are certain texts in the Word of God which the advocates of free will make frequent use of in order to prop up their own cause, and as weapons against the truth of God. And I believe that God, for His own wise purposes, has revealed such texts in the blessed Scripture that "He may take the wise in their own craftiness," and that those who wilfully close their eyes and stop their ears against the truth may find the Word of God to be "a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block" (Rom. 11:8, 9), that "they may fall, and be snared, and be taken" (Isa. 8:15). And thus the gospel, whilst it becomes to the elect of God a "savour of life unto life," is made to those "who stumble at the Word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed" (1 Pet. 2:8), "a savour of death unto death."

The text, or rather the first clause of it, which I have just read is one of those which Arminians make great use of in the support of their cause. But I hope I shall be able to show, if the Lord enable me and give me a door of utterance, that it is full of sound gospel truth, and that it is not, as they suppose, one which favours their self-righteous scheme, but contains a sweet and experimental description of the work of God the Holy Ghost in the hearts and consciences of God's people. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and

to do of His good pleasure."

We find in the text mention made of "salvation," and this "salvation" the Philippians are called upon "to work out with fear and trembling." What salvation is this? It cannot be the everlasting salvation of the soul, for God in His Word has most plainly declared that *that* is already accomplished. "Who *hath saved us*, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). And again, "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 11:14). The Lord Himself, with expiring breath, declared, "It is finished," and said in His last solemn prayer to His Father, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John 17:4). It is very clear, then that the "salvation" spoken of in the text is not the salvation from the wrath to come, is not that work whereby the elect of God are redeemed from all iniquity, and will all be brought to enjoy hereafter an everlasting "weight of glory." It is not of such salvation that the text speaks. For man cannot "work out" *that*; it has been already accomplished by the finished work of the Son of God. Sin has been eternally put away by the sacrifice of Christ, and there can be no adding to and no taking from that work of which Jesus Himself said, "It is finished."

The salvation then in the text is an *internal*, an *experimental* salvation; not the salvation wrought by Christ upon the cross *for* the elect, but a salvation wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost *in* the hearts of those that believe. And to this conclusion we are led by that part of our text where it is expressly said, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

In order, then, to get at the spiritual meaning of the

exhortation, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," we must connect it with the following verse—"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Thus this "working out" is only a working out of that which God works in; and, as God must work *in* before we can work *out*, I shall, with God's blessing, look a little at what is said in the second clause of the text before I enter into the meaning and suitability of the exhortation: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

It is God, then, that works in the soul "both to will and to do of His good pleasure;" nor have we any will nor have we any power, except as God is pleased to work both will and power in our souls; and this is a truth which every child of God is brought experimentally to know and feel.

I. Now when the Lord begins to work in a vessel of mercy to will and to do of His good pleasure, in order that he may work out that which God works in, He teaches him three things.

1. He works in him *a sense of felt sinfulness*. By displaying to the soul His holy law, by opening up the real nature of sin, and by laying guilt as a heavy burden upon the conscience, God works in every quickened soul a sense of felt sinfulness; and if a man has never had wrought in his soul by the power of God a sense of felt sinfulness, so as to open up to him something of the horrible nature of sin, and to sink him down into guilt and trouble on account of his vileness before God, he has yet to take the first step in vital godliness.

2. But with this sense of felt sinfulness, God working in the soul by the blessed Spirit, works also *a sense of felt ruin*. It is not merely a sense of felt sinfulness and guilt lying upon the conscience that is opened up by a sight of God's holy law,

but, accompanying it, there is a sense of felt ruin; that we are lost and undone; and that nothing but the wrath of God and the damnation of hell will be our lot, unless God Himself stretch forth His hand to save us from our justly merited doom.

3. And with this, God that "works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure," works also *a sense of felt helplessness*; He teaches us not only that we are utterly ruined and undone, but also that we are completely helpless to save our own souls, and deliver them from that judgment of which we stand in dread.

Now if a man has never had God to work in him these three things—felt sinfulness, felt ruin, and felt helplessness, he can know nothing of what it is to "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling." But wherever God works in a man "to will and to do of His good pleasure," he begins to "work out" just in proportion as God works in. Does God, for instance, work in his soul a sense of felt *sinfulness*? He works out, so to speak, that sense of felt sinfulness in groans and sighs and confessions before God. Does God again work in his soul a sense of felt *ruin*? He works out experimentally, the Holy Ghost enabling him, this sense of felt ruin in cries and lamentations on account of his lost and ruined state. And does God work in him a sense of felt *helplessness*? He works out this very sense of felt helplessness by sinking down under it as a heavy burden, and complaining into the ears of the Lord how helpless and how impotent he is to think a good thought, say a good word, or perform a good action.

But the text speaks of "salvation." Now salvation implies a being saved from those things which if we lived and died in them would be our ruin. The term "salvation," in this experimental sense, does not mean therefore only those

manifestations and revelations in which salvation as an enjoyed reality pre-eminently consists; but it includes also that whole work of God upon the conscience whereby we are saved from those things which if we continued in them would be our ruin.

For instance, before the Lord is pleased to quicken the soul, it is walking, for the most part, either in open profanity, or else in a form of self-righteousness. Now the very feelings which I have been describing of felt sinfulness, felt ruin, and felt helplessness that God works in the soul, are all to save it from those sins in which it was buried, or from that self-righteousness in which it was wrapped up. As God, then, works this sense of felt sinfulness, felt ruin, and felt helplessness in the conscience, the living soul works out, so to speak, of those things in which it was buried. If it were open sin, it works out of and away from those daring iniquities in which it was wallowing; if it were Pharisaism, it works out of that self-righteousness in which it was wrapped up; and if, as it occurs in some cases, it had a name to live while it was dead, if there was a form of godliness whilst it denied the power, as God works condemnation in the conscience, it works out of that empty profession of religion, and comes out of that mask into the scrutiny and under the heart-searching eye of God as a consuming fire.

II. But this branch of internal salvation having been effectually wrought in, and experimentally wrought out, another branch follows—that, in fact, in which salvation chiefly consists. As the Lord, then, works in the soul "to will and to do of His good pleasure," He works in the heart *light*, "whereby we see light in God's light." He that "teacheth to profit" casts a secret light into the heart, and in that light we see "the truth as it is in Jesus." A sacred light shines upon the page of God's truth; and that sacred light is reflected, as

it were, out of the page of God's truth into the heart. And that is the first time we have any knowledge of the way of salvation, the first glimpse that the soul gets that there can be any escape from the wrath to come.

When light, then, is thus cast into the soul by the operation of the Spirit through the Word of God, it sees that there is a Jesus at God's right hand, a divine Mediator betwixt God and man. In the beams of this heavenly light the soul sees that the Son of God has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and that those who stand interested in His finished work stand complete in Him.

Now as this is opened up to the soul, God working in it to will to be saved in this blessed way, and working in it also power to receive the truth in the love of it, as God thus works in the soul to will and to do, it begins to "work out" that which God works in. Does the Lord, then, work light in the soul, in order that heavenly light may be an experimental salvation from darkness? The soul, thus enlightened, works out toward that light which it dimly descries. As a man in a mine, who has lost his way, and sees some beams of the sun shining at the door of the mine, works his way towards the light which he sees, because he knows that that is the only way of escape; so when the Spirit of God works in the soul a divine light, it works onward and upward towards that light which it sees as its only door of escape from darkness that is felt.

But with this light He also works *faith* in the heart whereby it receives the truth as it is in Jesus. The Holy Ghost holds up before the eyes a crucified Christ, and bringing the savour of His name like the ointment poured forth into the heart, enables it to believe in Him unto life eternal. And as this faith is wrought in, the soul exercises it, and thus works out this branch of salvation, and works with it upon its Author and

Finisher.

III. And this leads us on to see a little what the Holy Ghost means by the expression, "Work out your own salvation *with fear and trembling*." How are "fear and trembling" connected with this experimental working out of salvation? They are connected with it in this way. The "fear" which the apostle speaks of here is that "fear of the Lord," which is "the beginning of wisdom," that "fountain of life" which causes a man "to depart from the snares of death." Now as God works in the soul "to will and to do of His good pleasure," everything that He does for it is weighed up in the conscience by this *fear* which is implanted by God. And as it is weighed up by this godly fear, the soul, in working out its own salvation, works it out "with fear;" that is, everything that God does for the soul is so weighed up in the balances of a tender conscience, and is so examined, step by step, by the light of godly fear, that the salvation itself is thus worked out "with fear," fear being that which ever accompanies God's work in the conscience.

1. For instance, does God work in the soul a sense of felt *sinfulness*? The soul working out this feeling which God has worked in works it out with fear. "Is it," says the soul, "the real teaching of God that I am now experiencing? Does this guilt which is upon my conscience come from God's hand in my heart? Do the convictions under which I labour proceed from the Lord? Do the tears that flow down my cheek spring from a really broken heart? Do the sobs that heave from my bosom proceed from this circumstance, that God has touched my conscience with His finger? Or is it the sorrow of the world that worketh death? Is it the remorse of Judas? Is it the repentance of Ahab? Is it the tears of Esau?" And thus, as the soul is conscious under these teachings that sin lies as a weight and a burden, it still works out that which God

works in with godly fear, lest upon this point it be deceived. So again with respect to the sense of felt *ruin*. A man under the teachings of the Spirit knows that he is utterly lost unless God is pleased to save him. But then it comes to this point in a tender conscience—"Is it of God? Do my feelings proceed from Him? Is it His own hand that works this sense of ruin and misery in my conscience? Or are my eyes only *naturally* opened? Is my conscience merely naturally wrought upon? Are these fears such as reprobates are exercised with? May I not have all this, and sink into hell at last?" And thus a sense of self-ruin is worked out with godly fear, and examined whether it proceed from the teaching of God in the soul, or whether it be the mere offspring of nature. And so with respect to felt *helplessness*. The soul, under these divine teachings, knows that it is utterly helpless to save itself from the wrath to come. It hears from the pulpit, from the mouths of experimental ministers, that all God's children feel their helplessness. But then the question arises, "Does my felt helplessness spring from divine teachings, or have I learnt it as a doctrine from the mouth of man? Have I got it from books, have I gathered it from ministers, or does it spring from the real work of the Spirit?" And thus this sense of felt helplessness, which is a part of salvation, is worked out in the soul with fear.

2. So also, with respect to divine *light*. The soul has seen light in God's light, and a blessed ray has been shed at times on the page of God's Word. The complete atonement which Jesus has made by the offering of His blood, and the perfection of His righteousness have been reflected into the heart and the conscience, so as to melt the soul with a sense of mercy. But then there comes the working out of this salvation which God works in; and the soul, under the sensations of godly fear and trembling awe, begins to look at this light which has come into the heart; and it speaks in this



way: "There is such a thing as walking in the light of one's own fire. Is mine that light? There is such a thing as having light without life. Is mine of that kind? There is such a thing as the barren moonlight of speculation, a knowledge of the doctrines, and a wayside hearer's joy in them. Am I under that delusion?" Thus the very light which God Himself gives is worked out with fear; the summoning it up, and bringing it under God's own heart-searching eye, that it may know whether it come from Him, or be merely a delusion of nature.

3. And so when the Lord gives *faith* in Christ, and brings into the soul a sense of His dying love, atoning blood, finished work, and justifying righteousness, there is still this question arising from time to time in the heart—especially after the first sweetness has gone away, and the first enjoyment passed off from the soul (and this is working out salvation with fear and trembling): "Are these feelings from God? Is my faith the faith of God's elect? How does it differ from the presumption of hypocrites? Does it stand in the wisdom of man, or does it stand in the power of God? Am I am sure that this faith which I have felt in times past was God's work in my conscience? Am I sure that it came from God Himself into my heart?" And thus this very *faith*, which is a branch of salvation, is worked out with fear lest the soul be deceived in this important matter.

4. So also if God has ever *heard our prayers*, if we have gone to Him in deep soul trouble, and the Lord has answered our petitions, and so have at the time been certain that the answer came from God—(and this is also a branch of salvation), yet often afterwards the soul is brought to ask, "Did it come from God? Am I certain that I prayed in the Spirit? Am I quite sure it was an answer from God Himself?" It is worked out with fear lest the soul be deceived in this matter, or lest God have merely answered the prayer as a

God of providence, and not as a God of grace.

5. And thus with respect to every *testimony* that the child of God receives, every *manifestation* with which he is favoured, every *promise* applied to his heart with power, every *season of hearing* the word with sweetness, every time that the Lord *blesses his soul* and makes it to be a watered garden, sooner or later he is brought to work out all this with fear, lest it be only a delusion of the flesh, not the genuine work and witness of God the Holy Ghost in his heart.

IV. But besides this "fear," we read also of "trembling." Now what is this "trembling?" I believe it to be what we read of in Hebrews 12:28: "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with *reverence* and godly fear." It is the trembling Moses felt when he said, "I exceedingly fear and quake;" which Isaiah experienced when he cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone;" which Daniel knew when his "comeliness was turned into corruption." This is a holy trembling, not the trembling of a slave, but the reverence of a son; not the trembling that proceeds from manifested wrath, but the trembling that proceeds from a sense of God's majesty and holiness.

The soul then that works out its own salvation with "trembling," works it out as in the immediate presence of God, as penetrated with a holy reverence of His great majesty, and as brought under the all-seeing eye of Jehovah Himself. But O, how few there are who are brought to bring their religion day by day, and sometimes hour by hour, before God Himself! How easy it is for a man to take up his religion without any sense of God's heart-searching eye! and how few there are who know what it is to cry unto God to make their heart right before Him, and, like Hezekiah in the temple, to be daily spreading before the Lord the secrets of

their heart.

O, if men were taught of the Spirit to bring their religion more before God and less before man, we should have much less profession and much more possession, and those who are really born of God would shine forth more conspicuously as the saints of the Most High.

The soul then works out its salvation, not merely "with fear" lest it should be deceived, but also with "trembling" or holy reverence, as in the immediate presence of God, knowing that no self-deception can stand before Him. It is deeply conscious that no hypocrisy, no presumption, no self-righteousness, no self-delusion can ever abide one look of His eye, or one touch of His finger. And thus it is brought to work out its salvation "with trembling," knowing that God will not be mocked.

V. And this leads us to examine more closely the expression, "*work out.*" How is a vessel of mercy to "work out his own salvation?" It is not by what are called "good works" that this salvation is wrought out. The Holy Ghost is not speaking of good works here; He is speaking of salvation; and that an experimental, internal salvation. How then is this *working* carried on? It is carried on by bringing, so to speak, into exercise that which God works in the conscience. Does God, for instance, work in the soul faith? Then faith works out as God works it in. Does faith in its first actings lay hold of God's justice in a holy law? Then there is a working out of this faith in the law, when the soul fears and trembles before God. And does God work faith in Christ? This faith which God works in works out upon Christ's blood and righteousness. Does God work a good hope through grace that it may be an anchor sure and stedfast within the veil? The soul works out, and works with this hope as God communicates it. And does

God in any measure work love in the heart? There is a working out of that love as God works it in; a going up to Him who gives it, a flowing forth in that very channel whence it came in.

This is the way that the Lord teaches His people, and works living feelings into living consciences; and when they are wrought there they do not lie in the soul as stones in the street, dead and motionless. They are not so much inert matter, but they are pregnant with life and warmth, sense and motion, and ebb and flow as the Spirit moves upon them. It is so even naturally. If we have any feelings naturally, those feelings will work out. Are we afflicted naturally in our minds? There will be some working out of that affliction. Do we rejoice in the success of some plan? There will be some working out of that joy; there will be some telling of it to a friend, some emotions of countenance, some joyous expressions whereby that feeling which is within us is worked out. So it is in religion. If God works trouble in a man's soul, he will work out that trouble by complaining of it to God. If God works prayer in a man's heart, he will work out that prayer by pouring it into the ears of the Most High. If God works reproof and rebuke, so that His frowns are sensibly felt and feared, there will be a working out of that reproof and rebuke by honest confession and acknowledgment of sin. Does God work brokenness of heart, contrition, and godly sorrow? There will be the working of it out in secret tears. Does He display His goodness and mercy? There will be the working out of praise by its freely flowing out of the heart as God works it in. Does He work in the soul any faith in Jesus? There is a flowing forth of this faith toward Him and upon Him. Does He work in the soul any love towards the Lord? There is a flowing forth unto, and a working out of this love upon His Person, blood, and righteousness. And does He work in the soul to love His

children, does He lay them on our heart, and give us a sweet union and knitting to them? There is a working out of this, not merely in those acts of kindness which we may do them, but also in the secret flowing forth of affection to them when they are not present with us.

VI. Now to know something of this heart and conscience work, is to work out our own salvation; and it is in his experimental working out of this that a man is brought to know what salvation is. It is indeed most true that God's people are saved eternally by Christ's finished work, and it is most certain that we cannot contribute one jot or tittle to our own salvation. But when we come to the reception of this salvation into the heart in all its blessed richness, divine efficacy, and heavenly fruits; when we come to salvation as a thing experimentally wrought out in the conscience, and lodged by the hand of God in the soul, then this working of it out comes into exercise; and no man ever knew anything of an internal work of God upon his conscience who was not more or less acquainted with the working out of that salvation which God worked in. It is in this that the real experimental teaching of God in the conscience differs from a dead profession. An empty, dead profession rests upon the letter of truth. It receives certain doctrines revealed in God's Word, and those doctrines it receives, not in the power of them, not in the experience of them, but simply as they are in the letter of the Word. There is in it no working in by God "to will and to do of His good pleasure," and therefore there is no working out of salvation as an experimental reality. None but God's people under the teachings of the Spirit know what it is thus to "work out their own salvation." And all who work out their own salvation will work it out "with fear and trembling." For when a man is taught by God to know what he is; when he feels what a deceitful heart he carries in his bosom; when the various snares, temptations, and

corruptions by which he is daily encompassed are opened up to him; when he knows and feels what a ruined wretch he is in self, then he begins to fear and tremble lest he should be damned at the last. He cannot go recklessly and carelessly on without "making straight paths for his feet," without "examining himself whether he be in the faith." A child of God cannot run heedlessly and thoughtlessly on without "proving his own work," without examining whether God is dealing with his conscience or not. And whenever a man's dreadfully deceitful heart is opened up to him; whenever the hollowness of an empty profession is unmasked; whenever he sees hundreds and thousands having a name to live while they are dead; whenever he feels how strait is the path, and how narrow is the way, and how few there are that find it; whenever he is brought to see how easily a man is deceived, and how certainly he must be deceived unless God teach him in a special manner;—whenever a man is brought to this point, to see what a rare thing, what a sacred thing, and what a spiritual thing religion is, that God Himself is the Author and Finisher of it in the conscience, and that a man has no more religion than God is pleased to give him, and cannot work a single grain of it in his own soul; when a man stands on this solemn ground, and begins to work out that which God works in, it will always be "with fear and trembling;" it will always be with some "fear" lest he be deceived, until God assures him by His own blessed lips that he is not deluded; and it will always be "with trembling," as knowing that he stands in the immediate presence of God, and under His heart-searching eye.

Now when a man works in this way, and gets at salvation by this path, he gets at it in a way that no man can dispute him out of. When God has worked in a man "to will," and not only worked in him "to will," but also worked in him "to do;" when He has made him willing to flee from the wrath to come;

willing to be saved by the atoning blood and justifying righteousness of Jesus; willing to be saved by sovereign grace as a sinner undone without hope, and glad to be saved in whatever way God is pleased to save him; willing to pass through the fire, willing to undergo affliction, willing to walk in the strait and narrow path, willing to take up the cross and follow Jesus, willing to bear all the troubles which may come upon him, willing to endure all the slanders which may be heaped upon his name; willing to be what God makes him, and willing to have what God gives him; when God has made him willing to be nothing, and to have nothing but as God makes him the one, and gives him the other: and besides working in him "to will," has worked in him "to do," worked in him faith to believe, hope whereby he anchors in the finished work of Christ, and love whereby he cleaves to Him with purpose of heart; when all this has been "with fear and trembling," not rushing heedlessly on in daring presumption, not buoyed up by the good opinion of others, not running down the stream of popularity, not taking up his religion from ministers and books, but by a real, genuine work of the Holy Ghost in the conscience; I say, when he has thus worked out with fear and trembling what God has worked in, he has got at salvation; at salvation from wrath to come; at salvation from the power of sin; at salvation from an empty profession; at salvation from a form of godliness; at salvation from the flesh, from the delusions of Satan, from the blindness and ignorance of his own heart; he has got at a salvation which is God's salvation, because God has worked in him to will and to do of His good pleasure.

VII. And this last expression shows us that we cannot chalk out any particular path, because though God works in all His people to will, and though He works in all His people to do, yet still it is "of His good pleasure." Some for instance are a longer and some a shorter time in finding the way; some sink

very far into convictions, and others do not go so deep into soul trouble; some are more favoured with blessed manifestations of Jesus, and others have them faint and feeble. We poor dependent creatures can only work out just as God works in. But He will so work in all "to will," and He will so work in all "to do," that they shall all work out their own salvation, and they shall all work it out with fear and trembling. And they will find their fear and trembling to be the most blessed helpers that God could give them in this work; for they become afterwards established in the "truth as it is in Jesus," just in proportion to their fear, and just in proportion to their trembling.

Now if this be the case; if this be a description, a feeble description I admit, of the way in which a soul is taught of God, what are we to say of people who learn their religion, without this process being carried on in their souls? Can we believe that they know anything experimentally of the matter who have never known anything of this work in their consciences? Thus, in God's mysterious ways, those who may think themselves perfectly right and have no doubt nor fear upon the subject, may find themselves one day perfectly wrong; and those who are exercised with doubts and fears, burdens, temptations, and sorrows, and all these things have made their consciences tender, and have brought them more into the light and life of God's guiding Spirit, will find that though they have walked in a dark, a trying and mysterious path, it has been to them a safe and a blessed path, and at last they will "receive the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."