

## A Work in Progress

### Philippians 1:6

The followers of Jesus asked this question in **John 6:28**, “*what shall we do that we might work the works of God?*” Not an unusual question, for all by nature ask it.

The Philippian jailer asked it in Acts 16:30 “What must I do to be saved? Jesus raised the question in Mark 8:37 “*what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*”

To most dedicated religionists the answer to this question is already settled in their minds. They (**Billy Graham**) believe they have done enough to meet the conditions necessary to salvation and are so sure, they are willing to go to the judgment pleading that which God calls “works of iniquity.” Your response might be; that’s too hard, too judgmental, and too unkind. (**Matthew 7:21-23**) 21 ¶ “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? (Not insignificant, but substantial works) 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Now, that’s hard, judgmental but final.

Notice the question again; “*What shall we do to do God’s work?* God, what can we do for you? The height of self-righteous pride is to think that God needs me to do his work. We think God has no hands but our hands. He has no voice but our voice; if I don’t do it for him, who will? Isaiah responded with (*Here am I, send me,*” only after God had cleansed him with a coal off the altar, i.e. baptized him with fire. And what was Isaiah’s message? Isaiah 1:4 “*Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters.*”

Christ’s answer to their question should set the record straight that salvation is of God without any contribution from the sinner. **John 6:29** “*Jesus answered and said unto them, this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*” Paul’s answer to the Philippian jailer was “*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*” To believe on him whom he has sent is to do the Father’s will and that is the work of God alone. God will execute his will to perfection. “God’s will is a done deal.”

Sinners can’t do God’s work; we can’t even do those works assigned us and we rob God of his glory in salvation by mixing works with grace?

A working God seems a paradox. The omnipotent, sovereign God gave this command, “*Let there be*” and creation was a finished work, and yet in **Genesis 2:2** account is given of God resting from his labor. “*And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.* Again, an omnipotent God needs no rest. The word “rest” means to cease labor by a finished work, a satisfaction in creation.

God, in six days created the heavens and earth and all there in and on the seventh day he rested. There he gave man the responsibility to subdue and have dominion over his creation. Man wants more, he wants dominion over God and most in religion today have dominion over their god. How do I know this; for years I worshipped a god who couldn’t save unless I let him.

Adam, our Federal Head and Representative, öseeking to be as Godö by one act of disobedience alienated the whole human race from God and initiated us all into idolatry and God marked us all öservants of sin,”(**unclean, unclean**) incapable of doing anything but works of iniquity. It is to such ones that Paul gives assurance about a work in progress. **Read Philippians 1:6** “*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” Out of this sea of fallen humanity God has a remnant, here identified as the object of his works.

I have taken the title of my message today, öA work in progressö from V-6.

Work is a good thing. The old saying; öIdle hands are the devils workshop,ö though not holy writ, has merit. To quote a Scottish proverb; öif the devil finds an idle man he will set him to work.ö Nowhere is this truth clearer than in spiritual matters.

Lost religionists are zealous for works. Their “*feet are swift to shed blood.*” (Romans 3:15) They are quick to offer some sacrifice to their god and ignore God’s commandment to “*be still and know that I am God.*” (Psalm 46:10) Being still is simply resting in Christ’s righteousness imputed and his redemptive work.

We are created to work. God placed Adam in the garden to dress and keep it. Ephesians 2:10 öFor we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.ö God commands us to work. **Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10** “*For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*”

And the devil wants us to work. And religious people love their works. But there is a work beyond our capability to perform.

Any work necessary to gain or maintain salvation in any way, to any degree is beyond our capacity to perform. Why; because we’re sinners and God is holy. Holiness demands perfection, unattainable by any sinner based on character and conduct. And besides, every work necessary to that end has already been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. There is not one condition left undone for me to meet and there is not one obedience I can render that will satisfy God’s justice. Conversely there is not one sin God will charge to me. My sins were charged to Christ and he bore them away on the cross. He put my sins away before I committed them personally. Those öin Christö have always been justified, sanctified, and made holy and righteous in God’s sight based on the accomplished work of redemption worked out at Calvary by the Lord Jesus Christ. He has effectually saved his people.

**Read Romans 6:17-18** öBut God be thanked, (**Thank God**) that ye were the **servants of sin, (WHEN)** but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the **servants of righteousness.**ö

Servants of sin and servants of righteousness are diametrically opposed. They are at opposite ends of the Christian experience. A servant of sin is what we are by nature. A servant of righteousness is what we are by grace. . We can change our conduct but we can’t change the heart. Here God charges us of being servants of sin. That label rightly became ours **by representation and imputation** in Adam; (for as in Adam all die; 1 Corinthians 15:22) **by nature** (Psalm 51:5 “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me,*

and by practice. (Psalm 58:3 *“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”*)

Any who seek, by their obedience to the law of God to be reconciled to God are servants of sin. But you say, I never sought such to be. Don't let Satan rob you of the heavenly reward by his subtlety. Will you believe God? **Read Romans 10:1-4** ¶ *“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel, (You can replace Israel with any of God's elect,) is that they might be saved. (They are servants of sin.) How so? For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”*

The question is not, were you ever ignorant of God's righteousness? Were you ever not submitted to that righteousness? Were you ever a servant of sin? The answer to all is a resounding yes. This is God's testimony from the scriptures that *“there is none righteous, no not one.”* (Romans 3:10) Unrighteous equals lost.

This scripture is proof positive that every son and daughter of Adam is guilty of ignorance first, and then rebellion against God. Ignorance is the mother of idolatry. Continued rebellion against truth revealed our lostness. It is truth that sets men free. Sinners are idolaters until they repent of idolatry, exposed by truth. When God said in Romans 3:10, *“there is none righteous, no not one,* he didn't say there was none moral, sincere or dedicated. He said there is none that doeth righteousness; all by nature are servants of sin. Until God exposes our servitude to sin we cannot do righteousness. A bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit. (Matthew 7:18) But a bad looking tree, when pruned, watered and dunged, (under the gospel ministry) if renewed to life, produces good fruit.

I believe this is Christ's meaning in **John 15:2** *“I am the true vine, (There is a counterfeit vine) and my Father is the husbandman.2 every branch in me (the elect yet lost) that beareth not fruit he taketh away.”* literally, *“He taketh up,”* (He quickens) Every sinner for whom Christ died must be born again and every branch in him must bear fruit, and every branch that bears fruit he purges.

Before regeneration and conversion, character and conduct exposes us as servants of sin. (Going about in ignorance or arrogance) The new birth reveals us to be servants of righteousness. (Pleading the righteousness of God alone) It is on this foundation that Paul's letter to the church at Philippi speaks of a work in progress.

Read Philippians 1:6

*“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*

What is this work? It is the work of God. It is a work already in progress. *“He which hath begun a good work in you.”* The Triune Godhead, though unique in offices are one in essence of Deity. One God, with three distinct offices for the purpose of redemption.

Though there are works peculiar to each of the Godhead, they are all the works of God. God the Father's works were necessary and peculiar to him. His election is unto salvation. His creation is unto his redemptive glory in salvation. He gave his only begotten Son for his people. He laid in

Zion the only true cornerstone. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy with a work of grace upon the heart.

**Read John 5:17.** *“But Jesus answered them, my Father worketh **hitherto**, (up to this time) and I work.”* My Father works and I must work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man worketh. There are works peculiar to God the Son. He as creator, by whom all things were made, took into union with his Deity true sinless humanity, body and soul which qualified him to put away the sins of those he represented by his death. God essentially considered cannot die. But this Man who is God did die. This is attributed to his humanity. *“Such an One became us. I.e. It was necessary for Deity to unite with humanity.*

In Luke 1 we have, in summary Christ and his father's work for his elect. This work done for us is the focus of the work done in us by the Holy Spirit. God the Father works, God the Son works and God the Holy Spirit, in regeneration, conversion and conformity reveals to the understanding and embracing of that accomplished work by every sinner for whom he died. Christ promised he would not lose a single one the Father gave him.

**Read again Philippians 1:6** *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*

Jesus, in John 16:7 said, *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”*

**Read John 16:15** *“All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he (Holy Spirit) shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you. He will reveal what already is ours based on the works of the Father and the Son.*

**Read Luke 1:76.** Zechariah, the Father of John the Baptist, old in age was promised a child by the angel Gabriel. Filled with the Holy Ghost at John's birth, Zechariah made this prophesy; **V76** *“and thou child shalt be called the prophet of the highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.*

John the Baptist was 6 months older than Jesus and was in the desert until *“the word of the Lord came unto him. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;”*

What is that baptism of repentance? It is that repentance required of John before baptism. John's doctrine was in no way indicating repentance as a condition of salvation. Baptism means to submerge. Repentance means to change our mind. It means to bury our former belief and ignorance that our works justify us. John's baptism was with water. His baptism was after a public confession and repentance. But John spoke of another baptism in **Matthew 3:11** *“I indeed baptize you with water unto (upon) repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”*

This is that good work of the Holy Spirit in Philippians 1:6, experienced by every sinner for whom Christ died. It is that radical change of mind wrought as the first fruits of regeneration and conversion and is tied inseparably with the remission of sins. Apart from an understanding of how sins are remitted there is no true faith or godly repentance. John's message in **Luke 3:8**

*“Bring forth therefore fruits worthy (that evidence) of repentance and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”* Lineage from Abraham means nothing toward salvation. (Paul in Philippians 3) *“It’s not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

Has God begun a good work in me? How can I tell? **Read John 16:15** *“All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he (Holy Spirit) shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. In Luke 1:77-79* we are given a synopsis of those things of Christ. What is the *ōITō* of Christ shown by the Holy Spirit?

It is Christ’s whole work of mediation, beginning with election, calling, justification and sanctification up to and including final glory in heaven based on the accomplished work of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. *ōITō* is that one thing of which all God’s people are ignorant. **Read 1:77** *“To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.”* This *ōgiftō* is more than just intelligence gained. It is a transformation from death to life through the power of the Holy Spirit in the gospel. To give knowledge is to quicken from the dead. It is to know God’s salvation experientially through regeneration and conversion. (John 17:3) Though knowledge is not the ground of our salvation, it is the evidence and result of it. That knowledge is salvation based on sins remitted.

How are sins remitted?ö How can a holy God remain just and justify the ungodly.

The Greek word *ōremittedō* means complete pardon and forgiveness by a just satisfaction. God cannot forgive sins arbitrarily; he must be just to do so. The gospel reveals how he accomplishes this miracle. Appointed our Surety in the Everlasting Covenant of Grace in eternity past, Christ there assumed the responsibility for the sins of all he represented. They were there charged to him who would in time bear them away in his body on the tree.

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:21** *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* God the Father charged my sin to his Son and charged his righteousness to me. Where sin is imputed, (charged) death is certain. Where righteousness is imputed life is given. Christ remitted our sins when he died *“the just for the unjust.”* **Luke 1:77** This is the knowledge given at regeneration and conversion.

The motive: **Read Luke 1:78** *“Through the tender mercy (Propitiation) of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us.* Salvation is by grace.

The word *ōdayspringō* mean branch. Christ is identified in Scripture as the Branch.

**Isa 11:1** *“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”* Christ is our dayspring from on high. He is that first light of dawn that follows a night of darkness. For what is his coming? **Read Luke 1:79**

*“To give light to them that sit (settled in) in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Have you ever tried to run in the dark? It’s almost impossible to make your feet move in the dark. No man will run to the way of peace until the darkness is dispelled. We don’t run to dispel it. We run because it has been dispelled.

God’s elect, though safe in Christ, and that forever, nevertheless sit in darkness by nature. We sit in the shadow of death in ignorance and void of God’s peace. What is the shadow of death?

At least twenty times in the Old Testament is reference made to the term *ōshadow of death.ö* Not once after the death of Christ. I believe this shadow of death is referring to the Mosaic Economy

and Israel's responsibility under that law. There is no salvation in the law; only death to its transgressor. Israel's temporal blessings under the Mosaic Law were contingent upon their obedience to the Law, but eternal blessings are the result of the obedience of Christ. **Read Hebrews 10:1-3** "For the law having a *shadow* of good things to come (sacrifices which typified Christ) and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. (The shedding of animal blood can never take away sins)

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a **remembrance again made of sins** every year."

Those animal sacrifices were a shadow of but not the substance of Christ. The type cannot accomplish what the substance or anti-type who is Christ can. The types could not make the sinner perfect. Only the blood of Christ, typified by animal sacrifices can remit sins.

Romans 8:3, "For what the law could not do." It cannot pronounce a sinner just based on that sinner's character and conduct. But Christ can and did, all based on his righteousness imputed, which is the results of law and justice satisfied.

The shadow of death is a reality to any today who desire to be justified by the law.

**Read Galatians 4:21** "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?" **read Galatians 5:3** "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.

**Read Luke 1:79** All this Christ accomplished for his people in order to "give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

This is that work begun in us when the dayspring from on high visits us with the gospel.

So the Holy Spirit shines in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is this light that enables us to see a salvation already complete in Christ. We see peace established between a Holy God and sinners. But we also see and experience the peace of God that passes understanding when the dayspring from on high visits us and shows the things of Christ to us. Things already accomplished in Him and sure to be accomplished in us when we see him as he is and be like him in glory.

Has He begun a good work in you? Then "Be confident of this very thing, that he which began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

*By Winston Pannell*