

Philippians 2:12-18

Working Out What God Works In – part 2

Work out your own salvation...for it is God which worketh in you – vv. 12,13

Our shorter catechism wisely teaches the difference between the acts of God's free grace and the work of God's free grace. Justification and adoption are defined as acts of God's free grace. It is an act on God's part to pardon our sin and accept us as righteous. It is also an act on God's part to receive us into his family and grant us all the privileges as sons of God.

Our sanctification, on the other hand is a work of God's free grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. It is with regard to this work of God's free grace that our text here in Philippians tells us that we're to work out our salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in us both to will and do of his good pleasure. God works in you and you, in turn, work out what God works in.

In the course of our studies we've been contemplating just what it means to work out salvation. We know, of course, that salvation is not by works. You could never be saved based on your works. Salvation is free and it is the freeness of salvation and the grace and love of Christ behind salvation that energizes the Christian to work out his salvation. Two sermons ago we considered a number of ways in which salvation is worked out.

We should work out our assurance of salvation; we should work out the holiness of our salvation; we should work out the advancement of salvation to others. In our last study we considered that the truth of working out what God works in us effects us in a number of ways. This truth that God is working in us should inspire our zeal; it should also keep us humble. We don't do anything that pertains to our salvation in our own strength. The zeal that spurs us on is nothing short of the Holy Spirit working in us to will and to do – to will and to do things that we would never will and never do in our own strength.

We also considered how the truth of this text delivers us from the sort of fatalism that excuses pacifism in the Christian's life. We acknowledge the sovereignty of God in salvation. We confess the truth of the catechism answer that tells us that God hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass but we do not, because of that truth, harbor the notion that there's nothing for us to do. Where the Spirit of God is at work there will be an increase of resolve and an increase of activity not a denial of any kind of Christian zeal.

I would remind you again of the need for the Christian to always keep in mind the distinction between what Christ has done for us and what the Spirit of Christ works in us. In terms of what Christ has done for us there is nothing for the Christian to do. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. Salvation is not by works. You could never earn salvation from God and the good news of the gospel is that salvation comes freely to all who see their need for it. So in that aspect of salvation there's nothing for the believer to work out. Salvation is something that is received by faith not earned by works.

The working out of salvation in our text views such works as the result or the fruit of salvation never the means to salvation. I would like to focus this morning on the verses that immediately follow the exhortation to work out salvation. We've touched on some of these verses already under one of the points of a previous study but I want to view them in some closer detail today.

I think it would be proper to say that in these verses Paul is giving a more detailed explanation of what it means to work out your salvation. And by looking at the imperatives and indicatives in these verses we're able to discern a picture of the Christian that works out his salvation. We're also able to see some guidelines as to how the Christian can conform to such a picture.

And so the question I want to raise and then endeavor to answer is simply this:

What Does the Picture Look Like of a Christian Who Works Out His Salvation?

Consider with me first of all that in these verses we see:

I. A Picture of Contentment

This picture of contentment only arises when you envision obedience to the exhortation given in v. 14 *Do all things without murmurings and disputings*. We focused on this exhortation in an earlier study at which time I pointed out how easy it is to fall into the temptation of being a murmurer and disputer. When you find yourself in a setting of murmuring and disputing whether that setting be in the work place or now-a-days in a setting of some form of social media it becomes easy to think to yourself – *I have so much to contribute to this conversation that I can't refrain*.

Like Eliphaz in the book of Job who would have done far better in maintaining the silent empathy that he had manifested for 7 days you find yourself saying *If I assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking?* (Job 4:2). And from that point forward in the book of Job his friends contribute to a setting of disputing which serves no purpose beyond adding to Job's misery and affliction and in the end draws God's rebuke to them all.

It's interesting to note that when you trace that word *murmur* through the Bible you find it most often used with reference to the Israelites in the wilderness. Ex 15:24 *And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?* Ex 16:2 *And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:* We read in our service earlier the 106th Psalm which traces the history of the Israelites in the wilderness. In a statement that pertains to them generally the Psalmist records in vv.24, 25 *Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD.*

Jude in his little epistle gives a vivid description of those that are ruled by the kind of spirit detected in murmuring. Jude v.16 *These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling [words], having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.* Listen to the way another English version puts it: *These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.*

This is why I say that the picture that emerges from our text in Phil. 2 of one working out what God works within presupposes obedience to the exhortation *Do all things without murmurings and disputings*: When you consider the settings in which you find murmuring and disputing the thing that is absent is contentment. And when you think of what it takes to avoid or overcome murmurings and disputings the thing that it takes is contentment.

And so if you wanted to express positively what Paul is in v. 14 expressing negatively I think you express the exhortation with the words of Heb 13:5 *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

The Christian who has learned contentment will find himself fortified against murmuring and disputing. I think you could say of the Christian who has learned contentment that he has mastered the discipline of being more conscious of his blessings than he's conscious of what he lacks or needs. This is not say that he's oblivious to the things he needs. We are after all taught to pray *give us this day our daily bread*. It's only to say that those things that he needs are not the things that dominate his heart. His heart is dominated by his knowledge that he's blessed, richly and abundantly blessed in Christ. He knows that he's blessed.

And a large part of working out what God works within will have to do with gaining a dominating consciousness of your bountiful spiritual blessings. Paul makes reference to one such blessing in the very next verse where he writes (v. 15) *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.*

I made reference in my introduction to the indicative statements and the imperative commands. *Do all things without murmurings and disputings* is a command. It's something we have to strive to obey. Being blameless and harmless and without rebuke is something we have to strive for. But the thing we don't have to strive for but is an indicative statement meaning that it states what we are, not what we're striving to be – such a statement is found in the phrase *the sons of God*.

That's something you are – not something you have to strive to be. That's a gospel truth that you need to reckon upon by faith meaning that you count it to be so. Working out salvation means counting certain things to be so. I've referred in days gone by to Ro 6:11 *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord*. Reckoning it to be so means counting it to be so as an act of faith. It

doesn't mean that you're to pretend that it's so or you're to strive for it to be so – no you are to count it to be so because God himself counts it to be so on account of Christ.

The same thing applies to your sonship. You are a child of God because Christ is your Savior. You have been brought into the family of God by virtue of Christ's life and death. It is only those that have been brought into the family of God that have the right to pray *Our Father which art in heaven*. Those that are aware, then, of their sonship in Christ are also aware of God's love for them. *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God* (1Jn. 3:1). This is another aspect, then, of working out salvation – working out salvation means exercising faith in the glorious truths of the gospel. Where your sonship is concerned you must appropriate the truth of it by faith.

And once you have worked it out in the sense that you've gained the assurance of it you will at the same time gain assurance of Christ's love. And those that are aware of Christ's love will have learned contentment. And I'll say it again because this is what ties the whole matter back to our text – those that have learned contentment will rise above murmurings and disputings.

What does the picture look like, then, of those that work out what God works within? It's a picture of contentment. Consider with me next that it's also:

II. A Picture of Contrast

Those of you who play with Photoshop on your computers will be aware of the tool that can adjust the contrast to a picture. You can slide a little arrow back and forth which will either add or diminish contrast in your picture. When you add contrast you make the bright parts of the picture even brighter and the dark parts of the picture even darker.

In the spiritual realm this kind of contrast should be found between the Christian and the world. What this amounts to is the Christian shining brightly in a world that is very dark. Look at how Paul states this contrast in v. 15 *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world*.

Do you see the contrast? The world is crooked and perverse – *a crooked and twisted generation* another version reads. In contrast to that which is crooked and perverse or crooked and twisted the Christian stands out as one who shines as a light. *Ye do appear as luminaries in the world*, (YLT). And here again the statement is an indicative statement. It's a matter of fact.

Christ himself stated the same thing in his sermon on the mount when he said *Ye are the salt of the earth* (Mt. 5:13) and *Ye are the light of the world* (Mt. 5:14). These are two statements of fact. Christ is not addressing the issue as something the Christian needs to strive for. He's making the statements as matters of fact, the same way Paul does in our text in Philippians 2. These two indicative statements made by Christ serve to demonstrate how the Christian is to function. As salt he's to function in a way that restrains corruption.

The Christian's opposition to sin serves this function. When we withstand things as abortion and sodomy we are functioning as salt. But the Christian is also the light of the world. His function in this connection is to dispel the darkness. It's not enough, you see, to withstand the forces of wickedness – those forces must be overcome. And it's the light that dispels the darkness. It's the light that puts the forces of wickedness to flight. Have you ever entered a dark room and turned on the light and then beheld as the fleeing insects scatter and search for a place to hide? It's the light that sends them scurrying about trying to find some dark corner in which to hide.

I love the statement that John makes in his gospel with regard to Christ when he says in Jn. 1:5 *And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.* The verse could literally read *and the darkness overcame it not.* The darkness does not conquer the light – but light conquers the darkness. Christ, of course, is the light of the world. But that light is to shine upon us and to shine through us.

And the closer we keep to Christ, then the more the light of our countenance will shine. This why a part of working out salvation is keeping close communion with Christ. 2Co 3:18 *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord.* We become like him who is the light of the world as we behold him in his word.

Now why the statement about Christians shining as lights is an indicative statement there is also an element of striving that must enter the picture. Have you ever turned on a flashlight only to discover that the batteries in it are nearly dead. It may give off light but the light is dim until you replace the batteries. Once the batteries are replaced it shines so much more brightly than it did before. In either case it gave off light but the bright light is preferable to the dim light.

The same holds true with the Christian. You may be but a dim light when you can and should be a bright light. It is in this connection that we're told by Paul what it takes to shine brightly. We must be blameless and harmless and without rebuke. To be blameless is to be above reproach; to be harmless is to be innocent or I think a good way to describe harmless is to be non-threatening. Do some people feel intimidated by your presence? Are you someone to be dreaded? If you are then you're not harmless, you're intimidating or you're brash and contentious.

I think of the Christian who thinks his approach to evangelism must be to shake his finger in the other man's face or the Christian who thinks the most effective way to evangelize is to mount the soapbox and pour out fire and brimstone. Better by far to be blameless and harmless and without rebuke. And we can certainly make a connection here with the previous verse that makes reference to doing all things without murmurings and disputings. Being free from a whining and complaining spirit contributes to being blameless and harmless and without rebuke.

You can certainly see, I hope, what a contrast exists or should exist between the Christian and those that are a part of a crooked and perverse nation. The trouble with so

much of Christianity today is that this contrasting picture does not exist. There's not enough contrast in the picture. And the reason it doesn't exist is because Christians find themselves too wrapped up with the things of the world. When we're suppose to be transformed by the renewing of our minds instead of being conformed to the world we find ourselves instead becoming too conformed to the world rather than being transformed.

And what this means, then, is that the need is great to work out our own salvation – to work out what God works within us so that we will and do his good pleasure. Where salvation is being worked out the picture will emerge, a picture of contentment – a picture that stands out in contrast to a crooked and perverse nation.

Consider with me finally that not only does this picture of the Christian working out salvation appear to be a picture of contentment and a picture of contrast but it also appears to be:

III. A Picture of Conviction

Look at the beginning of v. 16 which describes the child of God as *Holding forth the word of life*. This is an interesting phrase which is translated in another version as *holding fast to the word of life* (ESV). There are definitely two different concepts reflected in each translation. Usually when I see such interpretational issues behind varying English translations it becomes my cue to check the Greek to see if the Greek words are the same. You're aware I'm sure that just as there are varying English translations there are also varying Greek translations upon which the English translations are based.

One of the reasons we favor the King James version of the Bible is because of our belief in our denomination that the King James version is based on the best Greek version of the New Testament. In this verse in Phil. 2:16, however, there is no issue in the Greek text. The readings are the same whether you use the majority text or the Westcott and Hort Greek text.

And so this is one of those places in which interpretation enters the picture of translation from Greek to English. Did Paul mean holding forth the word of life or did he mean holding fast to the word of life. Keeping in mind that ultimately it is the Holy Spirit that guided Paul in the choice of the words he used I can't help but wonder if it was the mind of the Spirit to have the Christian contemplate both meanings of the phrase.

Holding forth and holding fast to the word of life both contribute to the picture that a Christian is a man of conviction. Holding fast the word of life presents the Christian as one who will not let go of the word of life. It doesn't matter to him that the Bible is scoffed at and mocked by pseudo intellectuals in the world. The Christian isn't so impressed with man's scientific expertise that he becomes convinced that the scientist knows science better than God knows it or that the historian knows history better than God knows it.

The Bible itself reveals the believer the animosity of the natural man toward God and so it comes as no surprise to the Christian that the Bible comes under attack. What's more impressive to the Christian is the fact that the Bible has withstood for thousands of years

the critical attacks of skeptics and unbelievers. He holds fast the word of life because he knows it to be the word of life. He has gained life through the word of life. He's gained spiritual life and he's gained communion with Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. He's gained assurance of eternal life and he has gained by this life a peace that passes understanding and a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.

And a part of working out salvation is spending time in this word of life and the more this word is read and contemplated and prayed over and memorized and utilized then the deeper the Christian's convictions become that this word is trustworthy and true. So the Christian holds fast to the word of life as a result of working out his salvation.

But he also, as a matter of conviction, holds forth the word of life. The statue of liberty comes to mind – that statue given to our nation by France, that statue which was opposed by some Christians (perhaps is still opposed) because they viewed it as a form of idolatry. That statue not only holds a light or a lamp but it holds forth that light. Her arm is extended and she's holding forth the light.

In lieu of the fact that Paul has just mentioned in the previous verse that Christians shine as lights I can't help but wonder if his intended meaning is to hold forth the word of life. We hold it forth with the conviction that just as the light of God's word led us to salvation in Christ it will also dispel the darkness in the hearts of others and have the same impact on them that it had on us. Just as we have discovered it to be a word of life through which we have found spiritual and eternal life we are driven by the conviction that since this word brought life to me it will also bring life to others.

It's not enough, you see, to hold fast to the word of life by contending for the truth of the word of life if we're not going to hold forth that word of life. Indeed it might be argued that the best way to defend it is to hold it forth so that others may experience the power of it the same way you and I experienced that power.

And so the picture emerges from these verses of the Christian that works out his own salvation. It's a picture of contentment – he's not given over to murmurings and disputings because he's learned like Paul to be contented in every situation in life. And it's a picture of contrast. The Christian who works out his own salvation stands out in stark contrast to the world. He stands out as a shining light against the dark backdrop of crookedness and perverseness. And it's a picture of conviction. As the Christian spends time in the word of life his convictions deepen about the truths taught in that word and he finds himself to hold forth the word that he holds fast to because he knows that the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword.

I wonder this morning – as I've endeavored to paint the picture of these verses have I painted your picture? Can you be characterized as a man or woman of contentment who stands in contrast to this present evil world and is governed by the conviction of the truth? I hope this is a picture of you. If it's not then you either need to come to Christ for salvation or you need to exert greater energy working out the salvation that God works within you.