

Bryan Station Baptist Church

INDEPENDENT

ORGANIZED 1786

MISSIONARY

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"

VOL. 10

LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

JUNE, 1979

NO. 9

Work Out Your Own Salvation

BY THE LATE: C. D. COLE

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, 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. Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

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" (Phi. 2:12-15).

The Scripture for this message is Paul's third admonition to the Philippians. His first admonition was to live worthy of the gospel. In the second admonition, he warns against strife and pride and exhorts to humility of which Christ was the supreme example. In this third admonition, the emphasis is on individual responsibility. He admonishes each one of the Philippians to work out his own salvation in the spirit of humility without murmurings and disputings.

We have here a fusion of apparent antagonisms, and what God had joined together man must not put asunder. Paul did not see any conflict between the two statements: You work out for God works in you. I think the truth of this passage has been obscured by the smoke of battle between two contending and conflicting theologies. The one school is at poor business in trying to make this passage teach salvation by works, and it is to be feared that the other school has at least quoted one statement in trumpet tones

while the other has been quoted in a whisper, if at all. The one school which is known as Arminianism is basically wrong in making salvation depend upon human works. It confounds merit and mercy, mixes law and grace, and thus invalidates both law and gospel. Calvinism may need improving at certain points, but the truth will not overthrow the system because it is basically right.

This Scripture is very plain if we will allow it to mean just what it says. It does not say, "It is God which worketh in you; therefore, take your seat and wait for Him to work." Here is a command to work, not to be idle. It is a command to work with fear and trembling, not with ease and self-complacency. It is a command with an encouragement: "Work out your own salvation, for it is God which worketh in you to will and to do."

Notice who is commanded. This command is not given to the lost, but to those who have been called saints, to those in whom God has begun a good work, to those who had always obeyed. The true meaning of the passage depends upon the subjects addressed. It will have one meaning if addressed to the lost, and quite another meaning if addressed to the saved. If a man is not a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the passage before us has nothing to say to him.

This is a command to work out one's own salvation. Here is personal responsibility. Every saved man has his own salvation to work out. No one else can work it out for him. This is a command to practical godliness; it has to do

with daily living. Salvation is not a mere bed to lie upon; it is a field to work in. Salvation is not something for enjoyment only; it is also something for employment. Salvation is more than a feeling of safety against the day of judgment; it is also an industry to be worked at. Working out salvation is not like drifting with the tide; it is swimming against the current. All Christians are labouring men and God is the Capitalist. We are all buck-privates and Jesus Christ is our Commander-in-chief. Salvation is not to be worked for, but to be worked out. Salvation must be in us before we can work it out. Salvation is not something which God begins and we complete. God does not plant the germ of life and leave us to care for it and develop it.

There is a sense in which God does all. He carries on the good work which He begins in us. It is He that perfects that which concerns us. Salvation is not a cooperative work between God and man. It is not that God does His part, and we do our part. There is a sense in which God does all, and another sense in which we do all. God works all the salvation in us from beginning to end, and we work all the salvation out from beginning to end. A quotation from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown is to the point: "Man is in different senses entirely active and entirely passive; God producing all, and we acting all. He produces our own acts. It is not that God does some and we do the rest. God does all, and we do all. God is the only proper Author, we the only proper actors."

There are many illustrations of this principle in the natural world. In the physical realm, God gives the breath and we do the breathing; He gives sight and we do the seeing. So, in the spiritual realm, God gives life and we do the living. He gives repentance and we do the turning from sin. He gives faith and we do the believing. He gives the strength and we do the working. He works in us secretly; we work openly. He dispels the darkness and we are seen as lights in the world. This principle is further illustrated in the parable of the vine and the branches. The vine produces all the fruit; the branches bear all the fruit. The power for fruit-bearing is all in the vine, but all the fruit is on the branches. The fruit on the branches is visible; the strength in the vine is invisible. It is not cooperation in which the vine bears some of the fruit and the branches the rest of the fruit. Both vine and branch do all, but in different senses. Christ said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches,without me ye can do nothing." It is by abiding in Him that we get strength for fruit-bearing.

We might distinguish between external and internal salvation. External salvation was the work of Christ on the cross when He put away

sin by the sacrifice of Himself; internal salvation is the work of Christ in us by the Holy Spirit. External salvation makes us safe; internal salvation makes us sound. External salvation is justification and is instantaneous and absolute; internal salvation begins in regeneration, and is progressive—and in this present life is only relative. External salvation is deliverance from the guilt of sin; internal salvation is deliverance from the defilement of sin. External salvation delivers us from the penalty of sin; internal salvation delivers us from the presence of sin. External salvation is a present fact for the believer—he is to reckon or consider himself to be dead to the guilt and penalty of sin; internal salvation is a future hope to be realized when we awake in Christ's likeness.

Now the salvation of our text is internal salvation or salvation in the subjective sense. It is salvation considered as an inward experience of grace. Only he who has experienced the work of Divine grace in his soul can work out this salvation. It might help us to understand the exhortation if we analyze this experience of grace. The salvation we are to work out is something in us. It is a God-wrought experience that we are to translate into deeds. This experience relates to three things: to sin, to self, and to Christ.

First, it has to do with sin. In an experience of grace, sin is real and awful, and in my heart I mourn over it, turn from it, and struggle against it. Now this experience is to be demonstrated. I am to show by the way I live that I hate sin, that I grieve over it, and that I shun it. A saint is not a sinner running into sin, but a sinner running from sin and when overtaken in sin, he grieves over it and confesses it to God.

Secondly, this experience of grace has to do with self: the sinner sees himself as God sees him. He takes sides with God against himself. He accepts God's verdict of guilty. Now one cannot hate sin without hating himself for sin is a part of oneself. The only thing we can lay claim to as our very own is our sin. We are stewards of all we have except our sin. Now it may not be good psychology to hate one's self, but it puts one in good company. Job abhorred himself. Isaiah confessed that he was unclean. Moses humbled himself before the Lord. Jeremiah felt most keenly his own unworthiness. And Paul called himself the chief of sinners. The prodigal as a typical sinner came home talking about his sins and confessing his unworthiness.

An experience of grace has to do with Christ. Christ fills the believer's horizon of hope. We trust Him and have no other object of faith. We love Him and acknowledge no other Lord. His blood is precious to us and we trust nothing else. And this experience is to be worked out. We are to show by lip and by life that Christ Jesus

is our Lord and Saviour. We strive to be what He wants us to be, to do what He tells us to do, and to go where He tells us to go. We are to keep His commandments and seek His will for our lives. This is working out salvation.

There is to be no self-confidence and self-sufficiency in working out our salvation. It is to be done with a spirit of fear and trembling. If I feel that I am able to live the Christian life without any mistakes or blunders or failures, then there will not be any fear and trembling. If I join the church boastfully, expecting to show others how to live the Christian life, there will be no humility but rather pride which goeth before a fall. We are to shun self-confidence on the one hand and show confidence in Christ on the other hand. We must be weak in ourselves but strong in the grace that is in Christ. Salvation begins in the heart and is expressed by the hands and feet and tongue, and to reverse this order is like painting the pump to purify the water, or like coloring the apple to make the tree good. We should take care of the heart by living close to the Saviour. By keeping the heart with all diligence, the outward conduct will take care of itself. If we live humbly and trustfully before God, we shall be able to live boldly before men. If we live on our knees in a prayerful attitude toward God, we shall be able to stand on our feet before men and resist the temptations that would sweep us into sin. The poet puts it like this:

“Christian, walk carefully: danger is near!
On in thy journey with trembling and fear;
Snares from without, and temptations within,
Seek to entice thee once more into sin.”

“Christian, walk cheerfully through the fierce storm
Dark tho the sky with its threats of alarm;
Soon will the clouds and the tempest be o'er;
Then with thy Saviour thou'lt rest evermore.”

“Christian, walk prayerfully; oft wilt thou fall,
If thou forget on thy Saviour to call;
Safe shalt thou walk thru each trial and care,
If thou art clad in the armour of prayer.”

“Christian, walk hopefully: sorrow and pain
Cease when the haven of rest thou shalt gain:
Then from the lips of the judge, thy reward—
“Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

**HOW SHALL THEY BELIEVE IN
HIM OF WHOM THEY HAVE NOT
HEARD?—Rom. 10:14**

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