

WORKING OUT WHAT IS WORKED IN

NO. 820

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 12, 1868
BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“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.”
 Philippians 2:12-13*

I HAVE frequently heard these words addressed to an indiscriminate audience, and it has always struck me that they have thereby been twisted from their right meaning. These words, as they stand in the New Testament, contain no exhortation to all men, but are directed to the people of God. They are not intended as an exhortation to the unconverted. They are, as we find them in the epistle, beyond all question addressed to those who are already saved through a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

No proof can be needed of this assertion, for the whole epistle is directed to the saints. It begins, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons,” and the verse before us contains within itself conclusive evidence that Paul was not speaking to unbelievers, for he calls the persons addressed, “my beloved,” and he says of them, “As ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence.” He was therefore writing to persons who had been obedient to the Gospel, but all true obedience springs from saving faith, he was therefore addressing those who, through faith in Christ, had been rendered obedient to the Gospel commands.

To obedient believers he writes, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” It may be right to use a text apart from the connection, and I will not venture to censure those who have dealt so with this passage, but it is never right to attempt to draw authoritative doctrine from a text apart from the context, and therefore nothing can be drawn from the text before us in reference to the duty or to the power of the unconverted, seeing that from its connection it is tied and bound to those who are saints in Christ Jesus, and to those who were and still continue to be obedient to the Gospel which Paul proclaimed.

If we sometimes looked a little more to the connection of sentences, we should be kept from very dangerous errors. The Bible ought to be treated in conformity with common sense, as you would use any other book. If you took the writings of any author, however carefully he might express himself, if you picked out a sentence here and a sentence there, you might make the man to say what he never believed. Nay, even make him to be the supporter of opinions which he abhors.

So it is with the Bible, if you pay no regard to the connection and general run of the passage, you miss the mind of the Spirit of God, and rather thrust your own mind into God's words than bring out God's mind from the words of the Holy Ghost.

The exhortation before us is solely given to the people of God, and I feel it to be more than my conscience could endure to force it into any other service. To as many as are obedient to the Gospel the word of the Holy Ghost comes this morning, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you.”

In a certain sense, the salvation of every person who believes in Christ is complete, and complete without any working out on his part, seeing that “it is finished,” and we are complete in Jesus. Observe that there are two parts of our salvation, the one complete, the other as yet incomplete, though guaranteed to be brought to perfection.

The first part of our salvation consists of a work *for us*, the second, of a work *in us*. The work for us is perfect—none can add thereunto. Jesus Christ our Lord has offered a complete atonement for all the

offenses of His people. He took His people into union with Himself, and by that union they became entitled to all the merit of His righteousness. They became partakers of His everlasting life, and inheritors of His glory. Saints are therefore saved completely so far as substitutionary work is concerned.

Such was the meaning of those majestic death-words of our Lord, “It is finished.” He had finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, and thus perfected forever them that are set apart.

Now with the work of Christ we cannot intermeddle, we are never told to work that out, but to receive it by faith. The blessing comes “to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.” Justification is not at all by human effort, but by the free gift of God.

The second part of salvation consists of a work in us—this is the operation of God the Holy Ghost. As many as were redeemed by the blood of Jesus, are also in due time renewed in the spirit of their minds. The Holy Ghost in regeneration descends into a man, and creates in him a new nature. He does not destroy the old, that remains still to be battled with and to be overcome.

Though the nature which the Spirit implants is perfect in its kind and in its degree, yet it is not perfect in its development. It is a seed which needs to work itself out into a tree, it is an infant which requires to grow into the stature of a perfect man. The new nature has in it all the elements of entire perfection, but it needs to be expanded, brought out, to use the words of the text, wrought out with fear and trembling.

God having first worked it in, it becomes the business of the Christian life to work out the secret inner principle till it permeates the entire system, till it overcomes the old nature, till it, in fact, utterly destroys inbred corruption, and reigns supreme in the man’s every part, as it shall do when the Lord takes us to dwell with Himself forever.

Understand then, it is not at all to the mediatorial work of Christ, it is not at all with regard to the pardon of our sins, or the justification of our persons that Paul speaks, but only with regard to our inner spiritual life. He says of that, “Work it out with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you.”

This morning I am sure I shall have your attention while I shall note first, *the matter to be worked out*. Secondly, *the model to be worked to*, thirdly, *the spirit in which we are to work*, and fourthly, *the great encouragement which is suggested in the text for such working*.

I. THE MATTER TO BE WORKED OUT is spoken of in the text as “your own salvation.”

Every Christian is to be a worker for the good and salvation of others. It is very doubtful whether a man knows the Lord himself unless he desires to extend the boundaries of the Master’s kingdom, but on no account is any Christian to think that he can safely neglect the interests of his own soul.

“Work out *your own* salvation.” Your charity must begin at home. You ought to seek the spread of the truth, but you must first know the truth yourself, and you must daily seek to understand it better.

You are bound to attempt the reclaiming of the wandering, but you must take heed lest you yourself wander, for however unselfish you may become—and God grant that you may have much unselfishness—yet still it is a law of nature, and equally a law of grace, that you should see to self-preservation, indeed, if you neglect this, you will become utterly unable to do aught for the salvation of other people.

“Work out *your own* salvation.” Ploughing another man’s field, suffer not your own to lie fallow. Indicating to another the mote in his eye, do not permit a beam to blind yourself. You preach against the sluggard, let not the thorn and the thistle grow in your own garden. You testify of the medicine which Christ can give, but physician see to it that you are yourself healed.

The first business of a Christian man should be to see that all his own graces are in a vigorous condition, that repentance always weeps for sin, that faith always looks to the cross, that patience becomes stronger to bear her cross, that hope’s eyes are clear to behold the coming glory, that to faith we add courage, and to courage patience, and to patience brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.

We are never to sit down, and fold our arms and say, “My life-work is over. I am saved. I have no pilgrimage to make to the Celestial city. I wage no war for driving out the Canaanites.”

O beloved, the time of rest will come on the hither side of Jordan, but as yet it is for you to press forward like the racer whose prize is not yet won, and to watch like a warrior whose conflict is not ended. Your own salvation is your first concern.

The text speaks of *working out* “your own salvation.” Now, the matter to be worked out is a something which the text tells us is at the same time worked in. We may safely defy anybody to work a thing out which is not first in. God, we are told in the second verse of our text, worketh in us, therefore it is that we are to work the inward towards the outward. We work out, bring out, educe from within ourselves to our exterior life, that which God constantly works in us in the interior secret recesses of our spiritual being.

An unconverted man cannot work any good thing out, for there is nothing worked in. If he works out that which is within, apart from what God has wrought in him, he will naturally work out that which is of his own nature or of the devil, strife, envying, murder, and I know not what.

Work out the human heart, work out what nature has worked in, what the devil has worked in, and you work out the hideous criminal, or else the proud and self-righteous Pharisee, but believer, there are better principles in you, and you are to see to the education—perhaps that is the word—to the working out from within your own soul that which God has wrought in you.

You have faith, work it out then, act like a believer, trust God in daily life. You possess the incorruptible seed, bring it out then, let your whole conduct be incorruptibly pure and heavenly. You profess that the Holy Ghost dwells in you, and He does so if you are a Christian, well then, let your whole conduct be saturated with the sacred influence. Let it be yours to lead the heavenly life of one in whom dwells the Lord from heaven.

Be you Christlike, inasmuch as the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in you. This is the matter to be attended to then, the bringing out, the working out, and developing the mine of grace which God has wrought in us.

“Your own *salvation*,” the text says, and that is correct enough. Holiness is salvation. We are not to work out our salvation from the *guilt* of sin—that has been done by Christ. We have now to work out our salvation from the *power* of sin. God has in effect worked that in us. He has broken the yoke of sin in our hearts. It lives, and struggles, and contends, but it is dethroned, and our life is to be the continual overthrow and dethronement of sin in our members.

A man may be saved from the guilt of sin, and yet at present he may not be altogether saved from the power of pride. For instance, a saved man may be defiled by being purse-proud, or proud of his position, or of his talents, now the believer must, with fear and trembling, work out his salvation from that most intolerable evil.

A man may be the subject of a quick and hasty disposition, he may be often angry without a cause. My brother, your salvation from sin is not complete until you are saved from a bad temper, and day by day with solemn resolution you should work out your salvation from that. I might take any form of besetting sin, or any one of the temptations which come from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and in each case bid you labor for salvation from its bondage.

Our business is to be continually fighting for liberty from sin, contending earnestly that we may not wear the shackles of any infirmity, that we may not be the bondslaves in any shape or form of the works of the devil. Working out by vehement efforts after holiness our entire deliverance from sin that dwelleth in us and from sin that contends without us, that I believe to be the great business of the Christian’s life.

I have heard it said that the good sculptor, whenever he sees a suitable block of marble, firmly believes that there is a statue concealed within it, and that his business is but to take away the superfluous material, and so unveil the “thing of beauty” which shall be “a joy forever.”

Believer, you are that block of marble. You have been quarried by divine grace, and set apart for the Master's service, but we cannot see the image of Christ in you yet as we would wish. True, there are some traces of it, some dim outlines of what it is to be, it is for you, with the chisel and the mallet, with constant endeavor and holy dependence upon God, to work out that image of Christ in yourself, till you shall be discovered to be by all men like unto your Lord and Master.

God has sketched the image of His Son in you, in the as yet but slightly carved marble He has fairly outlined it, and you have but to go on chipping away these sins, infirmities, and corruptions till the fair likeness of the Incarnate God shall be seen by all. You are this day, Christian, like the seed of Israel in Canaan.

You have not to escape from Egypt, you are already free. With a high hand and with an outstretched arm God has set you free from the Pharaoh of your sin, you have already passed through the wilderness of your convictions—the fiery serpents and howling wilderness are all over now, you have crossed the river, you are a saved man. Jesus the Joshua is in command. He reigns and rules in your spirit. You have not to fight your way towards the land—you are in it—for we that have believed do enter into rest.

But what have you now to do? Why, you have to extend the kingdom within yourself by routing one nation of sins after another. You have, in the power of the Spirit, to hang up your corruptions before the light of the sun—to destroy them utterly, and let not one escape, for Canaan will never be a place of rest to you till you have driven away the Canaanites and live in the land without association with sin. This is the matter then to which you are earnestly invited to attend. May the Holy Spirit grant you grace never to forget it so long as you live.

II. Secondly, what is THE MODEL TO BE WORKED TO?

Every artist requires some pattern or idea in his mind to which he is to work. I must beg to refer you to the chapter itself. Taking the text according to its connection, Paul has been urging the people here addressed to be “likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind,” in which four expressions we have the same idea. Paul would have all God's people to be unanimous, he would have them think alike—that is the precise interpretation of the Greek—he would have them hold the same views, receive the same truth, contend for the same faith.

He would have them as much alike in heart as in head. They are to be all found in the same love, not some loving the rest, but each loving all, and not even a single person exempted, every soul flaming with the sacred fire.

He would have them knit together in every sacred enterprise, being of one accord, or as the Greek has it, of one soul. As though instead of a hundred souls enshrined in a hundred persons, they had but one soul incarnate in a hundred bodies. He would have all the people of God to be fused into one race, made to love each other, in fact, with a pure heart fervently.

Now by this may we tell whether we are becoming like our Lord. What is our standing today towards our fellow Christians? If there be strifes and divisions among you, you are carnal and walk as men. From whence come divisions? Come they not from fleshly passions?

Brethren, if you cannot work with your fellow believers, if you cannot feel a love towards your fellow members—you may, perhaps, feel justified in keeping aloof from them, and speaking after the manner of men and before men, your justification may be a good one—but rest assured, were you fully developed in the divine life, you would have enough patience to bear with the infirmity of a brother, and to overlook his errors. You would have enough grace also to overcome your own infirmities, which may, after all, be the real cause of the division.

Brethren, when we set up divers opinions, one of us must be wrong, therefore we are not complete in knowledge. When we set up divers policies in a church, we cannot all be equally wise, therefore, some of us need to be better led of the Spirit of God. But oh, when a church marches like the old Roman legion, every man keeping step, and each warrior inspired as with one soul, when he saw the eagle brought to the front, and followed it to victory or death, then the church has life and vigor, and only then.

I thank God we have had much of this for many years, and I rejoice in it, but we still want more. There are some hard pieces of metal amongst us which have not been melted, and therefore, are not essentially one with the general mass. And I pray God, if at any time we shall begin to be separated in heart from one another, the eternal Spirit would put us in the fire again and melt us down, and cast us in the same mold, and may God send the like unity to all Christian churches.

Melanchthon mourned in his day the divisions among Protestants and sought to bring the Protestants together by a parable of the war between the wolves and the dogs. The wolves were somewhat afraid, for the dogs were many and strong, and therefore they sent out a spy to observe them.

On his return, the scout said, "It is true the dogs are many, but there are not many mastiffs among them. There are dogs of so many sorts one can hardly count them, and as for the most of them," said he, "they are little dogs, which bark loudly but cannot bite. However, this did not cheer me so much," said the wolf, "as this, that as they came marching on, I observed they were all snapping right and left at one another, and I could see clearly that though they all hate the wolf, yet each dog hates every other dog with all his heart."

I fear it is true still, for there are many professors who snap right and left, followers of Jesus too, when they had better save their teeth for the wolves. If our enemies are to be put to confusion, it must be by the united efforts of all the people of God—unity is strength.

The Lord send purity and unity to Zion, and then woe be to your gates, O Philistia! The standard of Judah's Lion shall lead the way to certain victory when the divisions of Reuben are healed, and Ephraim ceases to envy her sister. Heal our divisions, O Lord, so we shall tread down our adversaries in Your strength.

The next verse gives us another rule for guidance in our sacred statuary, as I shall call it. It is *humiliation*. "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Speak of great works that have been achieved by engineers, bridges cast over ravines, mountains bored—here is a work far more tremendous, and which no man might venture to attempt if it were not for the encouragement that God has already wrought it in him.

Nothing is to be done through strife. But how much of religious service is from top to bottom carried out in strife? Sometimes one sect will seek to increase itself merely for the sake of becoming larger and more influential than another. Do Sunday school teachers never try to get good classes and to obtain conversions that they may be more honored than others? Does that never enter the classroom? Do street preachers never wish to preach better than others, and in order that they may win more applause?

I know this from experience, that the spirit of strife may easily enough come into the pulpit, and that the minister may be seeking to outrun his neighbor when he thinks he is filled with zeal for God. The devil has had a finger in the building of many places of worship. The people have striven with one another, and then they have separated and built a new chapel, fancying that it has been all for the glory of God. Meanwhile, the devil has felt that it has been for his glory, and he has rejoiced therein.

Whenever I serve God out of any motive of emulation or strife, I prove to myself that I have not worked out my salvation from one evil passion at least, and I have need to fear and tremble, to begin again and labor diligently till the spirit of pride shall be driven out of my soul. "Let nothing," again, "be done out of vainglory."

But how much is done out of vainglory! How many people dress themselves out of vainglory! The thought is uppermost, "How do I look in this?" How many give to God's cause out of vainglory, that they may seem to be liberal! How often does a preacher polish his sentences and pick his words that he may be thought to be an able orator and an eloquent preacher! Vainglory!

It is a wonder that God accepts us in any of our works at all—in fact, He never could if He did not see them washed in the precious blood of Jesus, for in almost everything, from the lowest member up to the most useful minister of Christ, this vainglory will thrust itself in.

Ah! brethren, you must work out your own salvation from this spirit of vainglory, and do it with fear and trembling, God helping you. It is unworthy of you to be vainglorious, it is dishonorable to God. You

must be brought down from it. The divine arm will aid you in the struggle, and I beseech you, as ye have obeyed full many a Gospel precept from our lips, so be obedient now, and strive against all vainglory.

Whenever I have noticed it (and I have noticed it among you) I have been greatly pained, and pained because I may have set the example myself. Too often workers are disposed to magnify their own labors and think lightly of the work of others. It is remarked that such an institution is flourishing, but somebody says at once, "Yes, yes, there are many conversions, but I wonder whether they will all last!"

It is a miserable vice of workers to depreciate the work of other workers—it is quite melancholy to see it in the best of people, and I see it everywhere. People will, if they can, pull other people's work down in order to make their own work appear to be rising rapidly. This vainglory is all wrong. It all shows that we are not yet conformed to the image of that great model of perfection, Jesus Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our own profession.

Next, the apostle says, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Alas! how far we fall below this standard! How few have attained this grace! Bunyan beautifully portrays Christiana and Mercy coming up out of the bath of the interpreter's house. They have had jewels put upon them, and when they are both washed, Mercy says to Christiana, "How comely and beautiful you look!" "Nay," Christiana said, "My sister, I see no beauty in myself, but how lovely you look! I think I never saw such loveliness." They were both lovely because they could see other people's loveliness.

Your own spiritual beauty may be very much measured by what you can see in other people. When you say, "Ah! there are no saints now," it is to be feared that you are not one." When you complain that love is dead in the Christian church, it must be dead in your heart, or you would not say so.

As you think of others, that you are. Out of your own mouth shall you be condemned. Your corn shall be measured with your own bushel. When we come to admire the good in other people that we have not yet attained ourselves, instead of depreciating other people because they have not something which we have, when we get to that, we shall be evidently approaching nearer to Christ.

If the popular preacher can say, "My beloved brother A has a smaller congregation and is not a very attractive preacher, yet he visits his flock so carefully, and looks after each individual so well, that I admire him greatly and must endeavor to imitate him," and if the man with the small congregation says, "My brother B studies to find out acceptable words, and commend himself to the people of God, and he is very earnest, and is a great soul-winner, I wish I were as earnest, I admire it in him."

Why, these interchanges of loving estimate are infinitely more Christlike than for the minister with the large congregation to say, "Brother A has mistaken his calling, he cannot get above a hundred people to hear him, what is the good of his preaching?" And for the lesser light to reply spitefully, "Ah, B's work is just a flash in the pan—fine words and excitement—there's nothing in it."

Satan greatly approves of our railing at each other, but God does not. Let us learn this morning to esteem others instead of depreciating them, for in proportion as we exhibit a meek and lowly spirit, we shall be working out our own salvation.

The apostle lingers for one moment more to inculcate as a part of the salvation wrought out, the development of the spirit of mutual love and charity. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the interests of others." In temporal matters do not think it to be enough if your own business prospers, have a desire to see your brethren obtaining a sufficiency.

Do not be so greedy as to scrape everything to your own dish, but let other men have some share in your concerns. If they be poor and you wealthy, help them. If they are in straits and you possess abundance, minister to their necessities. Let not Christ be naked and you able but unwilling to clothe Him. Let not Christ be sick and you visit Him not. But if one member suffer, do you, as another member, suffer with him.

In spiritual things think it not enough yourself to live near to God, take the cases of others who may have backslidden, and lay them before the throne of grace, and seek by loving rebuke or gentle admonition to restore such as are fallen, remembering yourself, lest you also be tempted. Be anxious for

the good of all the members of the church to which you belong, in fact, so far as you can, seek the soul prosperity of all the people of God.

Observe then, my brethren, the drift of the apostle is this, if we are to work out our own salvation, it must be by putting self down in the dust and becoming unselfish. In proportion as we are selfish we are sold under sin, but in proportion as we are unselfish and live for others for Christ's sake, in proportion as we value others and set a low estimate upon ourselves, in that proportion we are advancing in grace, and are working out our own salvation from sin.

As I said before, here is the work, here is the difficulty. The descent into the Avernus of sin is easy enough. How many slide into sin as swiftly as travelers glissading down the snowy side of an Alp! but to toil upward, to climb the hill of God, this is the work, this is the difficulty. Blessed is that man who, leaning on the eternal arm, works out his own salvation, and is permitted to ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in His holy place.

Before the apostle had done with his subject, he set before the Philippians the best model in the world. Read the next verse and see after what image we are to be fashioned. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." There is your model.

Jesus stoops from Godhead to manhood, from the throne above the cherubim to the manger, side by side with the cattle. Stoop, my brother, if you would rise. If you would be great, be little. If you would be high, be low. If you would be exalted, condescend. Ay, and be like the Master was, for you never can be perfect without it, willing even to give up life itself if it is for God's glory, for renouncing His reputation, and being numbered with the transgressors, and crucified with malefactors, He then gave up His life to death—death in its most shameful and painful shape, the death of the cross.

We shall not have thoroughly worked out our salvation from the bondage of this fleshly body till we are willing to give up reputation and honor, if we may but serve Christ, and are willing to put our neck upon the block, our property to shipwreck, and to give all up for Him, if so He wills it. Ah! this is hard work. The roots of our selfishness go very deep. The deadly cancer of self-love has thrust its horrible roots into our souls, intertwisting them with the vital fibers of our heart.

I suppose when the last root of pride is torn away, we shall ascend to be with God. Until we are wrapped up in our winding-sheets, we shall never have completely worked out our own salvation. The battle ends only with life, but we shall earn the victory by God's grace, for His power within us shall help us to bring ourselves down to that heavenly nothingness in which God is all in all.

We shall master our members, we shall subdue our inclinations, we shall conquer our lofty thoughts, lay low our pride, and then, then will God also highly exalt us, as He has His dear Son, then shall we partake in the honor which belongs to Him, and reign with Him forever and ever.

Seeing that we are humbled with Him, and willing to die with Him, we shall be exalted with Him, and made to live with Him world without end. I have thus brought before you the model to which we are to work, as well as the matter which we are to work out.

III. We have in the third place in the text THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THIS MATTER IS TO BE WROUGHT OUT.

First it is to be an *energetic* spirit. "Work out." From the Greek word for "work" we get our English word "energy." The bringing out of the new nature into actual exposition in our life is a work of superlative difficulty.

Some professors appear to have imbibed the notion that the grace of God is a kind of opium with which men may drug themselves into slumber, and their passion for strong doses of sleepy doctrine grows with that which it feeds on. "God works in us," say they, "therefore there is nothing for us to do." Bad reasoning, false conclusion. God works, says the text, therefore we must work out because God works in.

The assistance of divine grace is not given to us to put aside our own efforts, but to excite them. God comes to us to work in us—what? To work in us to be indifferent? Ah, no! to work in us to will with resolution and firmness. Does He work in us, having willed, to sit still? Ah, no! He works in us to do. The direct effect of the influence of grace upon the heart is to make a man active, and the more grace he has the more energetic he becomes.

A man will never overcome sin except by energy. You cannot get your pride down I am sure by merely resolving to do it. You will have to watch that old enemy, and keep your eye on him as a detective watches a thief, for when you think, “At last I have really overcome him,” you will discover him at work under another shape, and your conflict will commence anew.

So with a hot temper, how some brethren have had to struggle with it, and when they have thought, “Now I really have mastered it by the grace of God,” then something has occurred in which the temptation has assailed them from another corner, and the old man has set the tongue on fire again.

Yes, our life must be spent in constant watching, and as we find ourselves tripping, we must add constant repentance, perpetually praying to be upheld for the future, unceasingly struggling to attain something yet beyond, pressing forward evermore. Evermore, I say, for to pause is to retreat, to halt is to be driven back.

The text further says, work out your own salvation “with fear.” What kind of fear is that? If you read a Romish author, he will tell you, “that this is the fear of purgatory, or the fear of hell,” and if you go to an Arminian author, he will assure you that it is the fear of falling from grace and being ultimately lost. I do not believe that *this* fear is ever needful to a child of God at all. This is the fear that genders to bondage.

If I am sure that I believe in Jesus, I am no more afraid of being lost than I am afraid that God Himself should die, because we have Christ’s word for it, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” You do not suppose that Paul, who knew that fear “hath torment,” and is cast out by perfect love, would tell us to work out our salvation under so disheartening an influence!

The fear of the text is that which makes a fear to offend so good a God, a hallowed, childlike fear, of which we read, “Blessed is the man that feareth always.” A reverential awe of the Most High, a pious dread of offending—this is the fear which is to be cultivated by us. It is not the fear which is the enemy of full assurance, but it is the fear which is opposed to carnal security or recklessness.

But the “trembling”—what is that? Is that the slave’s trembling? Nay, this belongs not to heirs of grace. They have a trembling which is akin to joy, for they “rejoice with trembling.” Before the Lord we do not tremble with affright, but we are moved even to quaking with a holy awe. Under a sense of the presence of God we tremble lest we should sin, we tremble lest that presence should remove, lest we should grieve the Spirit and vex the holy One of Israel.

We know what it is to tremble with the exceeding joy and glory of the love of God shed abroad in our souls by the Holy Ghost. Strangers do not understand us, but men of God will. George Fox was called a Quaker most probably because his whole frame seemed to shiver under the consciousness of the divine power.

We know what it is to contend with sin under a divine impulse, and to be filled with tremulous anxiety while wrestling with our foe. Sin is to be trembled at, and God also, so that there is a double cause for a solemn awe in the business of the soul’s inner life.

It is no child’s play, but an awful weighty business. I pray God we may know more of holy trembling, that the awful majesty of divine love may be so revealed to us that we may lie prostrate beneath its force, wondering how it is that we are permitted to stand in the midst of such a blaze of love, a bush burning but unconsumed.

“Even our God is a consuming fire.” Many learn by that text that the Lord out of Christ is a consuming fire to the wicked, and so indeed He is, but the passage means far more. The Lord is a consuming fire to us. “Who may abide the day of his coming? for he shall be as a refiner’s fire!” He will

consume in us all that can be consumed. His own nature in us cannot be consumed, but all of earth and evil will be.

What trembling may well seize us as we think of this! Only that which is Himself in us will come forth out of the furnace, that will live and flourish in the very heat of the fire, but all else must go. Every sacrifice must be salted with fire, this is sharp discipline, and well may we tremble at it.

IV. Lastly, without detaining you much longer, let us notice THE SWEET ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH THE TEXT AFFORDS.

We are to work out our salvation for this reason, “It is God which worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Here is help in an exercise beyond your power. Here is help all-sufficient for every emergency. Here is help which it ennobles you to receive, divine help, help which, if Satan shall put on his utmost force, and if your corruptions shall arrive at their utmost power, shall yet be more than equal to the day.

Grace all-sufficient dwells in you, believer. There is a living well within you springing up. Use the bucket then, keep on drawing, you will never exhaust it, there is a living source within. Continue to struggle, you will not exhaust the life-force which God has placed within you. There is a growing mine of gold, spend it, keep on scattering right and left. Inexhaustible, divine wealth is yours, therefore cease not to work it out.

Observe what God works in us, He works in us *to will*—the desire after holiness, the resolution to put down sin, the pang of grief because we have sinned, the stern resolve that we will not fall into that sin again—all, all is of God, and He who gave the desire will surely fulfill it.

But He that gave you the will does not leave you there. He works in you the power *to do*. The power to achieve the victory, the power to smite down the loftiest plume of pride shall come from Him. God is equal to all emergencies, therefore fear not. Though your inner life shall be subject to ten thousand dangers, He will give you power to do the right, the just, the lovely, and the true, for He worketh gloriously in you.

That which He works in you is pleasing in His sight. Note the words, “*according to his good pleasure.*” It gives God pleasure to see you holy, it is His delight to see you self-denying. If you conquer yourself it will give Him pleasure. Depend upon it then, since He is pleased with the result, and has put forth His own strong hand to bring it about, you, as you work, will not work at a peradventure, but in absolute certainty of success.

O brethren and sisters, my heart glows with the hope of being altogether rid of the power of sin. Oh, what a day that shall be when neither sin nor Satan shall vex the pleasures of our purified spirits! What bliss will it be to see God face to face, because the ungodlike and unheavenly has been altogether cast out of us! O long expected day begin!

The best heaven I could wish would be perfectly to be rid of myself, perfectly to be free from tendencies to evil. Is not this the heaven you are panting after? If it is, you shall have it. If you have grace enough to pine after it, grace enough to labor for it, you shall yet have grace enough to win it.

I have thus addressed God’s people, and I leave the matter with them. I wish I could have addressed you all as believers, but alas! you rebel against the Lord, you will not come to Christ, you will not trust in Jesus, yet to you unbelievers I have a message. It is but a sentence, and I have done, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” You have nothing to do with working yet. Believe first, and when you have believed, then set to work.

But now, the first Gospel message to you is this, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” with its awful alternative, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” God save you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PHILIPPIANS 2

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.