

God will complete His work in us

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Date: 16 August 2020

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[0 : 00] So I'd like to begin the message this evening with a few questions. Maybe you're listening tonight and you're a Christian and yet have you ever wondered if God has given up on you?

Maybe you have done something contrary or against the will of God and you feel that God will never forgive you. Or maybe you worry that you haven't got what it takes to be a Christian and you don't know if you'll still be one, say, five or ten years down the line.

And this worries you. Maybe you feel you keep letting God down and you feel helpless and hopeless of ever changing. Or possibly you hear and believe those lies that God doesn't care about you or you're the worst person in the world not fit to be called a child of God.

And what we are going to look at this evening from God's word will answer these questions and hopefully put any worries or doubts to bed. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians is writing to a church that he has planted in Philippi.

He cares for them and he regularly gives thanks for them and prays for them. And we see this in the first 11 verses of chapter 1, which we have just read together.

[1 : 27] He thanks God for their partnership in the gospel, which refers to their support of the gospel work that he was doing. And then he prays to God for their continued growth in love, knowledge and discernment.

And we could summarize that as he prays for their growth in Christ-likeness or their growth in sanctification. But he says something in the middle of these verses, which I believe have brought hope to many believers throughout the centuries since this was written.

And I believe that it can bring us hope to this evening. It is, of course, the sixth verse of chapter 1 in the book of Philippians.

And it says this, And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 33] And so I want to split this verse up into three parts and focus on each of the parts separately. And so firstly, we see the apostle's certainty, the apostle Paul's certainty.

Secondly, we see that it is God who has begun the good work. And finally, it is God who will bring it to completion. And so from this verse here, we see that the Christian is like a piece of art in the making.

And it is certain that the artist will bring it to completion. They won't be left half finished, but they will be finished to the highest standard. And one day, they will be perfected.

Firstly, then, we see the apostle Paul's certainty. And he is certain about what else he is about to say.

And we know he is certain because of those words. He says, and I am sure of this. I am sure of this. Paul doesn't write to the Philippians saying this is possibly the case, or I could be wrong on this.

[3 : 44] But instead, he writes, I am sure. He is certain of what is about to follow. And there is not a doubt in his mind. Some translations translate it as being confident of this very thing.

Or the Amplified says, I am convinced and confident of this very thing. And so the apostle Paul is certain about what he is about to say.

But we can have even more certainty. And we can have certainty and even more certainty because we know that the apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write what he wrote.

And so God is the one who says that he has begun this good work in you. And God is the one who says that he will bring it to completion. Not only can we be certain because Paul was certain, but we can be certain because God has revealed this by his Spirit.

God doesn't want to go back on his word and what he says he means. I recently watched the book of Daniel, the movie.

[4 : 53] And in it, they cover the scene where King Darius, his counselors, they're jealous of Daniel. And they want to get in trouble with the king, but there's nothing that they can charge Daniel with.

And so they create a law and they bring it to the king. And the law is that only the king must be prayed to for a certain amount of time. And anyone caught praying to God or an idol, they will be put to death.

And so Daniel is caught praying as the counselors knew he would be. And so he's brought before the king, before King Darius. And King Darius, he likes Daniel.

And Daniel is his top person, if you like, his top counselor. And so King Darius, he tries to find a loophole in the law to try and get Daniel off the hook.

But there is no revoking the law because it was the law of the Medes and the Persians that once something was made law, there was no reversing it. There was no going back.

[5 : 55] And so Daniel was sent to the lion's den by King Darius. And in the morning, we all know the story, he emerged alive.

God protected Daniel from the lions. But the point is this, the point I want to make is that God's word is like the law of the Medes and the Persians. If God says something, then he means it.

And he will not go back on his words. And so because this verse is in our Bibles, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can be sure and we can have certainty along with the Apostle Paul that what we are about to look at is true and is certain.

This means that if we doubt God's keeping power or his love for us or his commitment to us as Christians, then essentially we are doubting God and his word.

We are to look to our circumstances or our feelings, but we are to look to God and his word. And we are to believe his word no matter what.

[7 : 02] I was once doing street evangelism when I lived in England down in Derby. And I was talking to a man and I think he was a Christian and we were discussing a topic. And I said, well, the reason I believe it is because the Bible says so.

And to my pleasant surprise, all of a sudden, he said the words, well, if the Bible says it, that settles it. And there was no more questioning.

There was no more discussion. The Bible said it and that was all that mattered and that settled it.

May we have the same mentality of that man and say, if the Bible says it, that settles it.

May we hold on to this truth that God has not given up on us.

And we know this because the Bible says so. The Bible says that if God has begun a work, as we are about to see, God will bring it to completion.

[8 : 05] Once the theologian, Cole Barth, was asked by a student if he could summarize his theology in one sentence. And it's another example of just taking God at his word.

Cole Barth replied and he said, Jesus loves me. This I know. For the Bible tells me so. May we have this attitude. And say, I know God has not given up on me.

I know God loves me. I know God is with me because the Bible tells me so. If you are a Christian this evening, then all these things are true of you.

And we know this because the Bible tells us so. And so now what exactly does this passage say about God's faithfulness to us and the fact that he will never give up on us?

Well, firstly, we see that it is God who began the good work. He began the good work. He began the good work in his Philippian believers. And therefore, he began the good work in all believers.

[9 : 09] The verse says, he who began a good work in you. And so here the Apostle Paul is referring to the fact that it is God who begins the work of salvation in his people.

He is the one who opens their eyes to their sin. He is the one who draws them to his son. He is the one who gives them spiritual life and enables them to believe the gospel.

Salvation is of the Lord. It is God who begins the work. The Shorter Catechism puts it like this in question 31. It says, what is effectual calling?

Effectual calling is the work of God's spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery. So opening our eyes to our sin, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills.

He persuades us and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel. God is the one who first worked in these Philippian believers.

[10:14] He is the one who began the work of salvation in them. And we see an example of this in Lydia, don't we? And she was, it's believed, one of the first believers in Philippi.

We have read it in the book of Acts chapter 16. And it says this, the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And this then resulted in her and her household being baptized. Without God working in us, as we see with Lydia and we see in his passage and we see in the Shorter Catechism, without God working in us and beginning this work of salvation, none of us would be saved.

None of us would turn to God. We would still be dead in our sin. It is God who takes the initiative. It's God who saves. And without this, no one would be saved.

I guess we can liken this work of God to a car. Before and after it has been started. Before the car has started up, it is lifeless and motionless.

[11:24] No sound comes from the engine. There is no electrical power. No power to wind down the windows or turn on the lights. But as soon as the key is put into the ignition and it's turned, all of a sudden there is life.

There is power in the car. And the engine begins to rev and the car is able to drive up to top speeds. All of a sudden there is electrical power. And you can wind down your windows and you can listen to the radio.

And this is like what God does to a Christian before he is able to see his sin and put his trust in Jesus. God gives the Christian spiritual light.

He opens a person's eyes to their sin and their condition outside of Christ. And he draws them to the Savior. So that they call out to him and they experience a peace that only Jesus can bring.

Our gracious is our God. Our God. That whilst we were rejecting him and going our own way, he turned us to him and he gave us spiritual light.

[12:30] The Apostle Paul covers this further in the second chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. And he writes these words. He says, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

What a bleak picture that is of what we were like before we became Christians. And what you are like this evening if you are not yet a Christian.

We were dead in our sins, sons of disobedience, following the world and the devil, and were by nature children of wrath. What a helpless and hopeless situation.

But with God, all things are possible. And so we read on and it says, But God, notice it is God that made the difference.

[13:39] It was all his doing and he deserves all the praise and all the glory. It says, But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved. Even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Think about that. Whilst we were the enemies of God and rebelling against him, because he loves us with such a great love, he made us alive with Christ.

He gave us spiritual life. He began the good work in us, as we read in our passage in Philippians.

And so if you're listening this evening, and as a Christian you ever doubt God's love for you, then remind yourself that if God didn't love you, then you wouldn't be a Christian.

It is because of his great love for you that he sent Jesus to die for you, knowing all your flaws, knowing every sin you'd ever commit against him, knowing you'd let him down, and it's because he loves you.

God loves you. John Newton's hymn, it still rings true. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved the wretch like me.

[14:59] I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see. And it's all because of the amazing grace of God, which was compelled by his love for us.

God began a work in us, because he loves us. But the news gets even better. It doesn't stop there. The Apostle Paul carries on, and he says, not only has he begun a good work, but he intends to bring it to completion.

The beginning of God's work is seen in the giving of spiritual life, to those that are dead in their sin. But it doesn't stop there. Though we are saved as soon as we are made spiritually alive in Christ, and we trust in Jesus, and our faith is in him, God has a plan for our lives, and that is, that we may be like Christ in our character, that we may grow in Christ-likeness, more and more and more. God will bring the work he has started to completion. And this is what the Apostle Paul is certain of in this verse.

And this is what brings us great assurance that God will never let us go. After saying that God has begun a good work in the Philippian believers, the Apostle Paul writes these words, the final part of the verse.

[16 : 23] He says, speaking of God, that he will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Paul knows that God will not give up on these Philippian Christians.

If God has begun a good work in them, then he will surely bring it to completion. God doesn't make mistakes. There won't be any rejects like in a factory when items don't meet the standards of quality control.

Everyone in Christ will turn out perfect in the end. Some may take more work than others, or God will have a different method for one person compared to the other, or we will all have the same outcome.

Everyone who has been born again by the Spirit of God will come to perfection. And notice our verse tells us when. It says, in the day of Jesus Christ.

No Christian will reach perfection this side of eternity. It's a process. No person alive is at the finish line, if you like.

[17 : 38] We are not fully sanctified. Sanctified. But there will be a time when we will be brought to completion. We are all on this path.

Yes, some further than others. We are all on it nonetheless. And we will all be brought to completion when we get to glory, or when Jesus returns.

1 John 3, verse 2, says these words, Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared.

But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. When we get to heaven, we shall be fully sanctified.

We shall be perfect in our character. We'll be sinless. And when Jesus returns, we shall receive the promised, resurrected body. This is God's plan for us, and he will not stop at anything less for each one of us who are united to Jesus through faith.

[18 : 48] Sinclair Ferguson is helpful when he writes concerning this verse in Philippians, but how is Paul so confident that when God brings new life, he also keeps working in us until the day of Jesus Christ.

So he asks the question, how do we know? How can Paul know? And be so confident that when God brings new life, he also keeps working in us until the day of Jesus Christ.

And he continues, he writes, that last phrase gives us the clue. The reason God has begun to work in us is because he has a long-term plan. He is getting us ready to see and share in the glory of his Son.

God has a long-term plan, and Sinclair Ferguson says that he's getting us ready to see and share in the glory of his Son. God is in it for the duration.

He never breaks his covenant, especially when it costs the blood of his Son, Jesus, to establish it. He will not give up on us because, as Sinclair Ferguson put it, he has a long-term plan.

[20 : 01] There was a movie that came out in the late 1990s, and it was called Little Men, and it's about a couple who took orphans from the city to their homes, to their country home, and they fed them and looked after them and educated them and turned them into well-behaved, happy children.

But there was one boy who came and from a very young age, he'd been orphaned and he'd been taught to steal and to fight, and he was a bad influence on all the other boys. And it all came to a head when one night, he got the other boys to smoke a cigar and gamble, which resulted in their bedroom catching on fire.

And the couple, they were so disheartened because they'd never failed with any of the orphans, but with this boy, they felt that they couldn't help him. But one day, there were signs of change and eventually, he too became well-behaved and happy like the other children.

And in the same way, God will never give up on us or fail with us. In fact, that couple could have failed with that boy, but God never can and never will.

He has adopted us into his family through the shed blood of his one and only son, Jesus. And he has made us more like Jesus in our character more and more each day.

[21 : 25] God has begun the work in us and he will surely bring it to completion. Of course, we have the responsibility to be turning from sin and putting it to death.

We have the responsibility to be obedient to God's will as revealed in his word. But God is also working in us by his spirit to conform us into the image of his son.

And this should bring you hope that if you feel like God has given up on you or if you feel that you have let God down and he's distant from you or he will never forgive you or if you're struggling with a particular sin, of course, yes, you must turn from your sin.

But it is God who is working in you and by his grace, by his grace, you can. God enables us to put our sin to death.

God loves us and will never leave us not forsaken. If you are God's child today, then you will always be his child. He is devoted to you and he will never let you go.

[22 : 35] If he has begun a good work in you, then he will surely bring it to completion. The highest price has already been paid so that you can be forgiven, so that you can be adopted into God's family.

Surely he won't allow anything else to get in the way either. It's like you've spent millions of pounds doing up a mansion and start to pay all that money. You're hardly going to give up on the renovation work because the guttering needs cleaning out.

In the same way God sent his son to die for you, he sent his spirit to give you spiritual life, do you honestly think that he would change his mind and turn back after all that?

It's like a traveller who has travelled a thousand miles to get to his destination and at the last five miles he decides to turn back. If God has begun a good work in you, he will surely bring it to completion.

And so may we find peace and hope and assurance as we hold on to this marvellous verse and continue to walk with our gracious God who has redeemed us through the blood of his dear son.

[23 : 45] May we never lose hope. May we never listen to the lies of the devil that say that God has given up on you, saying that you're hopeless and you're helpless and you will never change.

Because if you've been born again by the Spirit of God, he's working in us and by his grace, he's making us more and more like Christ. And if you're here listening this evening and you're not a Christian, then I bid you turn to God whilst he may be found.

Put your trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin. There was another person who became a Christian in Philippi who is also recorded in the book of Acts in the 16th chapter.

And he is known as a Philippian jailer. And he cried out to the Apostle Paul and he said, what must I do to be saved? And Paul said to him these words. He said, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

This is God's command to us. Believe in the Lord Jesus. And then you will truly know the peace and the assurance that this verse brings in Philippians.

[24 : 50] The Apostle Paul writes, And I am sure of this. I am sure of this. That he who began a good work in you will surely bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

May we take God at his word. The good work he has begun in us. He will surely bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

What a great God we serve. A merciful God. A gracious God. And may we live the rest of our lives to glorify and to honour this great God of ours. I'm just going to close in a word of prayer now and we will sing our closing song.

Heavenly Father, we truly are grateful for your graciousness to us, Lord. For your love and your kindness towards us, Father. As we've heard, Lord, we don't deserve it one bit.

We were dead in our sin. We were your enemies. We were rebelling against you. Children of wrath, following the ways of the world and the devil and yet in your love and your mercy and your kindness, you broke into our lives.

[26 : 05] You opened our eyes to the truth. You drew us to your Son who you sent to die for us upon the cross. And Lord, now we know from your word that you are changing us, that you're working in us and Lord, we are confident because your word tells us so that you are bringing this

work to completion.

I pray for any listening this evening who maybe have struggled with doubts, struggled, Lord, with maybe assurance or struggling, Lord, thinking that they've done too much or that you've given up on them, Father.

I just pray that they may find hope and peace this evening that you'll be speaking to them through your word, Father. And I just pray that as we continue to walk with you, help us, Lord, by your grace to be putting our sin to death and to be conforming us to the image of your Son.

Pray, Father, as we sing our remaining hymn, Psalm, Lord. I just pray, Father, that you will bless our hearts, that as we praise your name, Lord, that you will be glorified.

And as we go into this coming week, that we'll be holding on to your word, and we'll say along with that man, if the Bible says it, well, that settles it. We thank you for your love and your mercy and kindness towards us.

[27 : 23] And we just pray, Father, that you'll be glorified through all that we do. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

To the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time and now and forever.

Amen.