

The Outward and Inward Aspects of Perseverance

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[0 : 0 0] and 13 of Philippians chapter 2. I'd like to just pick up a number of points from that hopefully for our encouragement and to apply to our own development as well as Christians.

Well as you well know Paul himself knew what it was to be in lockdown. He suffered imprisonments as well as some many many other challenges, difficulties and persecutions for the sake of the gospel. And this is one of the letters that he actually wrote from prison. Most scholars think he wrote from this letter from prison in Rome and although we can't be sure about the location it's certainly one of his prison letters. And all the way through it he expresses his love for the Philippian church and although everything was not as it should have been in the Philippian church yet it was obvious that there was a very special bond between Paul and these Christians in Philippi. And when it comes to these verses what you find him doing is emphasizing the need for them to persevere. We could say that that's really the gist of these verses and that's one of the main points he's mentioning here and emphasizing for them as an imperative that they would actually know that he's no longer present. They would keep on doing what they were doing when he was there, when he was teaching them and when they met with him and that is to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. To persevere in other words in the Christian faith, in Christian activities.

But then he balances that up by saying for it is God who works in you both to will and to work, or to will and to do for his good pleasure. In other words the perseverance that's required of us, as you can see also in chapter 3 from verse 12, he's talking there about he himself pressing on, forgetting what lies behind, straining forward to what lies ahead. And what he's saying here in chapter 2 is that our persevering or our working out our salvation rests upon the persistent grace of God that keeps on working within God's people. So that what God requires of us in terms of perseverance, and we'll see some of the matters that are included in that, we don't depend on our own ability for that, we actually have the comfort of knowing that while we are required absolutely to work out our salvation, to persevere in a Christian life, yet it rests upon the persistent grace of God actually working in us.

Professor John Murray put it this way when he wrote, and this is in his little book, Redemption, accomplished and applied, and he said, God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor is our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation, as if God did his part and we do ours, so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. The relation is that because God works, we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us. And that's the way the balance is in these two verses as well, because what you find is that Paul is saying, work out your own salvation for, because it is the case that God is actually working in you. So we're going to deal with that point first, because it comes really as the foundation or the motivating factor that produces the working out as a result of God working in. So let's look at that. He says here, it is God who is working in you, and it is an ongoing work. He means both to will and to do of his good pleasure. How does God work within us? Well, we could spend time tracing all this back, of course, to God's love from all eternity.

We could actually say that it also connects with the intercession of Christ for his people, now that he is in glory. Our working out and God's working in are attached to these important theological concepts. But I want to focus simply on the Holy Spirit's work, because I think that's really what Paul intends by God working in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. It's through the work of the Holy Spirit in us that we are enabled to do this working out. And how does the Holy Spirit's work lead to our working out? Holy Spirit's work in us lead to our working out of our salvation. Well, I'm just going to mention two things. First of all, regeneration conversion, because those are linked. I'll just put them together. A regeneration conversion is itself a product or a result of the Holy Spirit's work, the Holy Spirit's creative work, bringing us to be born again, creating new life in us where it didn't exist before. And so that regeneration conversion, you might say, is something that leads directly to our working out. I'm going to put up at the end of a study tonight, I'm going to put out what I'm going to call a sermon map. It's actually one of the ways that I try and work out the main points of a sermon and try and put them together after that. But I'll put it up at the end. So if you are taking notes, I hope that might help you at the end if we will go through the various parts that I'm going to mention here in the study and see where they relate together more closely as we follow that on the sermon map. So the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration is itself the way by which God enables us, by his working in us, to come to work out our salvation, as he says here, with fear and trembling. The other element you could say is mentioned, is connected with the Holy Spirit's work, is our sanctification. If you cast your mind back to chapter 1 and verse 6, you'll find that he is actually saying, I am sure of this, that he who began the good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. In other words, God has begun this work and is going to be completed by him.

[6 : 40] And part of the way that God brings it to completion is that he enables our perseverance in the things that form our Christian life. So that really basically is all I'm going to say about the God of God working in us will come to his will and work and his good pleasure in a moment.

Our will and work for his good pleasure. But that, because that belongs to the second thing, which is our working out. And our working out, as I said, actually stems directly from God working in us.

We can never make progress without God working in us. And yet we don't fall back, as John Murray said, on the fact that God is working in us, that that's the source of our spiritual progress and life.

We don't actually fall back on that as if there's nothing required of us at all. Because what Paul is actually saying here is very precious. He's saying, work out your own salvation.

It's almost as if it really depended on them. Indeed, you could put it this way, that our view of this has to be something like, we have to work out and persevere in the Christian life as if it depended on our own ability.

[8 : 02] But we have to do it with such trust and faith in God, as if we had no work to do at all. When you keep the balance, that's what you really end up with.

And our working out, I'm going to mention three elements that are included in that. This is by no means everything to do with our working out of our salvation.

But our salvation means every aspect of our salvation as it pertains to the practicalities of our Christian life. He's not really leaving anything out when he says, work out your own salvation.

In other words, God has given you salvation. He's placed you in that relationship with himself, but he's given you this responsibility of working it out, of working towards its completion, although you're doing it in dependence on God himself working in you.

And the first thing within that is faith and trust and putting them together, because by and large, faith and trust really amount to the same thing. And our faith and our trust as we think of working out our salvation involves, firstly, God's word and God's promise.

[9 : 14] What we're doing tonight, actually, is very much part of working out our own salvation, because we do so in faith and trust, which comes to use the word of God in order that we know his will, that we know his guidance, that we grow through what he tells us, that we learn more and more about him, about ourselves.

And so God's word and God's promise within that is something that faith uses in order to apply that to the practicalities of working out our salvation.

And you notice here he's saying with fear and trembling. That doesn't mean, we often say this, it doesn't mean that you do this with a kind of trepidation that's scared of God.

This again fits in with the emphasis in the Bible elsewhere about the fear of God, which means raw awe, respect, reverence, honoring of God.

So you could say the fear here includes the fear of offending God, the fear of being untrue to God, the fear of failure in respect to testifying to who God is by our way of life, the fear of backsliding, fear of everything basically that will dishonor God.

[10 : 36] So the fear and trembling here is taking account of the majesty, the awesomeness of God, and indeed how that also marks his salvation.

It's an awesome thing. When you think of the salvation that we have in possession, it's based upon Christ and the work of Christ, the work that God has done in Christ, and that involves the cross, the resurrection, all of Christ's sufferings, his death, his rising from the dead.

And when you think about all of that and the awesomeness of that, it really is something that fills you with fear and trembling in the sense of respect and awe at that majesty.

So there's God's word and God's promise that really lies at the heart of our use of faith and trust. There's fear and trembling in terms of how we respect God, how we actually deal with his revelation.

And he says here as well, both to will and to work for his good pleasure, so that our faith and our trust, which as we said has come from God's work of regeneration in us, and God's continuing work within us, it affects our will and our actions, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

[11 : 59] So it really goes to the deepest part of our souls, our will, which lies behind why we do things and how we do things. It's really the very pump, if you like, of our actions, for our actions in life.

And our will, as it is renewed by the work of regeneration, stimulates and leads us to work in the way in which God enables us to work, to have our Christian work, our Christian lifestyle, not just working practically, but our whole Christian lifestyle.

It's from God working in us, and from our working out our salvation, which involves this will, our will and our actions.

And notice how interesting this is. It is our will, and it is our work that he's talking about here, which fits with it being working out our own salvation, just for his good pleasure.

And isn't it, again, a wonderful connection there between God's good pleasure and what really is your and my aim in life, which is to please him.

[13 : 15] Well, the two things really come to coincide and to dovetail beautifully together, the way we desire God's glory and the way that God is always working towards his own glory, the way that it's his good pleasure that he has in mind in his work within us, enabling us to work it out.

And in our wills and our heart, it's his good pleasure. It's his glory. It's his praise that we always have in mind or should have, although it's not there to the same extent, of course, all the time.

So it's faith and trust, and that involves God's word and promise, fear and trembling and our will and our actions. The second thing I'm going to mention in our working out, and it's mentioned in prayer already, and that is prayer itself.

When you flip forward to chapter four, it's one of the places where Paul mentions prayer, and he's giving them here some comfort and assurance and encouragement, where he's saying, don't be anxious about anything.

This is in verse eight of chapter four. Sorry, chapter, yes, chapter four, verse six, sorry. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[14 : 35] Then he adds this, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus or through Christ Jesus.

And that's very closely connected with what he says about prayer. Instead of being overanxious, as if God was not in charge of our life inwardly, as if God was not enabling us to work out our salvation, he says, because you know that, prayer forms a part of how you come to lay everything onto God and how you're actually specifying prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, all your requests be made known to God.

And there are many other aspects of prayer that you could mention, and indeed they're there in Philippians as well. You can find out some connections there for yourself. So our working out involves faith and trust, involves prayer.

And again, we've come to, I came across this this morning, and my reading's just this morning, reading through George Swinock, one of the Puritans.

It's very easy to read actually, compared to some of the Puritans, but this is what he said on prayer. As scripture is God's letter in which he opens his mind to man, so prayer is man's letter in which he opens his mind to God.

[16 : 01] Swinock there was dealing with communication between God and his people, and how it's a two-way communication that God himself has begun, but now he's saying, it's just as you normally would send a letter.

In those days, that was pretty much all they had. In order to send a message, you would write it down, you would send it by carrier, and off it would go. And the recipient then saw your mind written out in the letter.

Well, this is what he said. Swinock said, this is really what prayer is. As God has made his mind known to us in his word and scripture, so our prayer is our letter to him, opening up our mind to him, as we specify in prayer with thanksgiving, those things that we ask of him.

So there's faith and trust in our working out of salvation. There's prayer, very much at the heart of it. And there's also the fellowship of believers.

Perhaps sometimes we don't give that the emphasis we should. It's really important, when we go through the letters of Paul especially, how often he uses the plural rather than the singular.

[17 : 14] And that's what he's doing here. Work out your own salvation, plural. Although he knows it's the responsibility of every individual, yet he knows that every individual is set in the community of God's people, wherever they're located, so that that itself is a great contributor, really, to that working out of their salvation.

And if I mention a number of things within the fellowship of believers, you can see from that how they fit into our working out of our salvation. There is, of course, first of all, worship itself as we worship, but we're not able to do it as we normally would do together, physically, geographically.

And that's still what we're doing tonight, as you well know. And you remember in Philippians 3, how Paul was giving them a warning about people who were not Christians and were actually against the gospel.

And in fact, were very much on the lookout for the likes of Paul himself to cause trouble for him. But he says, look out for these people, he says, for we are the real circumcision who worship God by the Spirit and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, a number of elements together there, among which is who worship God in the Spirit.

It's a characteristic of God's people in the fellowship of believers that they worship God in the Spirit. Where that worship is lacking, where there isn't the element of worship together, it doesn't matter what other kind of relationships we might have, it's not the church, it's not the fellowship of believers in the New Testament sense.

[19 : 00] Fellowship of believers secondly involves growth. Go back again to chapter 1, I'm confining all our references to Philippians. There are many others in other epistles of Paul as well on the same topic.

But growth, he talks there in chapter 1 and verses 9 to 11. And this in fact is something that fits with prayer because this is what he's praying for. He's praying for these Philippians in the following way.

He's saying, I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more. He's saying here, I want your love and I'm praying your love to grow increasingly.

He's not putting any limits on us. With knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

There are a number of elements that we mentioned already built into these verses themselves. But you see how growth fits in there and how it fits with prayer. As soon God, through his regenerating, creating power, brings us to life, we are concerned to grow.

[20 : 13] We are concerned to grow not just individually, but to grow as part of that fellowship of believers. And that's why we're concerned that our congregation that we belong to will grow.

Not just numerically, though that's not unimportant, but that we will grow spiritually. That we will grow in the spiritual ways in which the Bible itself sets out for us.

The third thing to mention in the fellowship of believers is, in fact, support or mutual support. I think it's wonderful the way that Paul in chapter 2 here gives two examples of Christians that he's commending to the Philippians as good examples.

First one is Timothy and the second one is Epaphroditus, who was a messenger from Philippi to Paul. He says here of Timothy, first verse 19, from there onwards, he says, for I have no one like him who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. That's what he's saying about Timothy. He wasn't seeking his own interests.

[21 : 24] First and foremost, he was seeking the interests of Jesus Christ. And that really says a lot about the quality of fellowship that we seek, that we enjoy, that we want more of, that we want to see even improve further.

That Timothy is an example here how Christian fellowship in mutual support of those who belong to it actually have people looking not, firstly, at their own interests, but at the interests of others.

You could also go back to chapter 2 and find other evidence of that and what he says near the beginning of the chapter. Be of the same mind, be in full accord with one mind.

Don't do anything from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. And then he comes to this wonderful passage about Jesus.

So all of that fits in with how the church should be and is a support in its fellowship for each individual that's in it. Now we can't say that we're perfect in any way in that or anything else, but it is something that belongs to the structure of the fellowship as you look at it in the ideal sense in the Bible as it's presented there.

[22 : 38] And Epaphroditus is the second example that he gives of support in Christian fellowship of believers because in fact he says that Epaphroditus was actually near death for the work of Christ.

He had almost died as a result of overdoing it in regard to the work of Christ risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service from the Philippians that they have not at that stage when he's talking here about Epaphroditus being quite as they should have been with regard to supporting Paul.

But indeed he says he was ill near to death but God had mercy on him and not on him but on me also. So he talks here about Epaphroditus, my brother, my fellow worker and fellow soldier and messenger and minister to my need.

All of that comes into the richness of the fellowship of God's people where all of these features belong to their interaction not just between Paul and Epaphroditus but Paul and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church it's all one wonderful network of gospel and loving concern and fellowship.

And the final thing in the fellowship of believers is the element of witness, worship, growth, support and witness.

[24 : 06] Because he talks here about being united and striving together in different ways. Again back in chapter 1 we have in verse 27 there he's saying whether I come and see you again or else be absent I want to hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

In other words what they are as a fellowship and what we are as a fellowship and aim to be as a fellowship has a direct relationship and impact indeed upon the watching world because the better that fellowship of believers is in its quality and faithfulness to Christ the more in fact we are strengthened against that opposition but the more that opposition is persuaded whether they will in fact accept and admit it or not but this is what Paul is saying it is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation and that from God I don't know how that works except that God is behind it but it is a truth that he's talking about that the world even if it hides the fact comes to be convicted by a quality of fellowship among God's people that cannot be denied so they're united in striving for the gospel but they're also in chapter 2 united in holy living verses 14 to 16 following on from the passage we're looking at tonight do all things without grumbling or questioning that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world holding fast to the word of life in other words that too is part of the fellowship of believers which itself as we're saying belongs to the working out of our salvation in fear and trembling the witness of God's people to Christ and for Christ and for God has itself a direct bearing upon the world they're shining he says as lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation well these are the main points that I wanted just to lay before you you can obviously follow it a lot of these for yourselves as you like and I'm going to just bring up this map that I mentioned and we'll go through just briefly picking out the points as a bit of a bit of revision anybody who wants this

I can actually have it in a PDF so that it can go down online to you if you want to have that so here is the map can everybody see that okay begin with the Philippians on the left there you find if I go to where am I screen sharing sorry I was looking for a pointer there but should be there somewhere anyway Philippians 2 there the box on your left the bit we had in the introduction is here at the top and perseverance are working out and then persistent grace where it comes from and then the John Murray quote that I mentioned which comes up there and it's a really great way of producing or seeing the balance between the two parts of the verse so then you go to

God working in us that obviously leads directly down here to God or to our working out and God working in us involves the Holy Spirit's work there's regeneration and conversion and I've put a direct line from that to our working out because that's what it comes from and there's also sanctification which is just mentioned I'm not going into that as I said so God working in us involves the Holy Spirit's work and that leads us directly to our working out of our salvation and these are the three main elements I mentioned faith and trust there's the connection there with God's word and promise fear and trembling our will and our actions there's the second element there of prayer and I put an arrow there across as well from prayer directly to God's word and promise because there is a very close connection between our prayer life or activity and God's word and God's promise which in prayer we constantly refer to and then thirdly there's the fellowship of believers there and the four elements the worship the growth support and the witness but there's some arrows there as well if you notice from worship there's a direct arrow there in blue to growth because it's very much a part of our worship that through worship we actually grow and grow spiritually there's another arrow then from growth through to

I'm just going around that way to avoid going over these blue bits a direct connection there from growth through to witness it's as we grow that our witness also grows and we pray that we will become more effective in our witness and that's these are the other elements that I mentioned there involved in that as well okay so I'll leave that up for the moment but I'll conclude now with a word of prayer let's just pray we give thanks oh Lord that it is you who work in us and that your work in us continues by your Holy Spirit assuring us Lord that the work that you have begun you will indeed bring to completion at the day of Jesus Christ your work goes on in the lives of your people through to the return of Christ himself and we bless you that that in his arrival we will find the work that you have begun here on earth in us to be brought to its crowning glory through our resurrection from the dead too to meet the Lord himself and be with him forever and we thank you Lord for the way in which your spirit maintains within us that spiritual energy by which we attend to all the aspects of our Christian salvation so that we are enabled by you to work out our salvation with fear and trembling forgive us we pray for our shortcomings

[31 : 01] Lord we know that there is nothing wrong and nothing lacking in your work in us but we do confess that there is much oh Lord in our own working out of our salvation that is amiss and that is short of what it should be and sometimes contrary to what you require of us forgive us we pray for that and help us to rededicate ourselves daily to you so that we may grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ so receive us we pray now hear our prayers and pardon our sins for Jesus sake Amen