

GOD WORKS – WE WORK

"Beloved,...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." – Phil. 2:12,13.

THE GOSPEL CHURCH has been called with a "high calling." The fact that we accept the "call" signifies that we appreciate it and consider it something very desirable. The condition upon which it is offered is the giving up of everything that we have. By our acceptance of these terms we demonstrate our appreciation of the great opportunity thus granted us. If, therefore, we recognize the call that has come to us, we may know that God is willing for us to accept that call. It is important, therefore, that we understand the conditions in order that we may make our "election sure."

The suggestion of the text is that to accomplish this end we must do some kind of work. Our salvation must be *worked out*. God does not purpose to take us to glory regardless of our own endeavors. True, these endeavors would not take us there; but, on the other hand, we shall not get the glorious things unless we strive for them. Hence, the exhortation is to "work," to "labor," to "strive" for the prize. But whatever may be our endeavors to keep the Divine Law, we are assured that success is not brought about merely by our own aspirations and best endeavors; but that he who called us has himself begun a good work in us which he is both able and willing to accomplish.

We are not alone, therefore, in working out our salvation. God is working *in us* and *has already* worked in us; and his promises confirm this fact with enlivening power. He works in us not only to "will," as when we made our consecration, but, the Apostle says, he works in us to "do." That is to say, it is not sufficient for us to have good *intentions*, but these must be brought into practical relationship with our *lives* and must serve for development of our characters. Thus God works *in us*.

Thus we are co-laborers *with* God in the work of this present time, of building up the Church and in making our "calling and election sure."

LET US FEAR LEST WE SHOULD COME SHORT

The Apostle admonishes us to work out our own salvation with "*fear*." The Scriptures declare that "The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Prov. 9:10.) Our first thought of the Almighty is, very properly, an apprehension of his greatness and our own insignificance. But as we come to know of his arrangement and Plan, this kind of fear gives place to respect and love, for he is very gracious toward all who are inclined to be in harmony with his beneficent arrangements and purposes. We find that he has made glorious plans, which are working out day by day, and that we have a share in them. Hence, *this* kind of fear casts out *dread*.

There are Christian people, however, who have not [R4796 : page 108] progressed far along the Christian way, but who are bound up in false doctrines. Of these the Scriptures say, "Their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men." (Isa. 29:13.) Greater knowledge of God and of his character will dispel this kind of fear.

The "fear" of our text seems to be a fear of non-attainment of the glorious promises; of failure to become partakers of the divine nature. The Apostle counsels us, "Let us, therefore, fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." – Heb. 4:1.

"Let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" as we recognize how great and blessed are the things in reservation for us if we are faithful, and yet how we may miss this wonderful opportunity of glory, honor and immortality. Whatever is of sufficient value for us to greatly desire, is worthy of great care in respect to our attitude toward it. While the fear in this case may not indicate a literal trembling, yet it implies alarm lest we, having had the courage to undertake to run the race for the prize, should allow anything to impede our progress or,

possibly, lead us to abandon the race. This course would effect our ruin. Recognizing the great prize, we should fear and tremble lest we should let it slip from us and so lose it.

OUR LORD WAS HEARD IN RESPECT TO THAT WHICH HE FEARED

The same sort of *care* which always attaches to *fear* is indicated in our Lord's case where we read that "he offered up strong crying and tears" and, as the Apostle says, "He was heard in [respect to the thing] that he feared." (Heb. 5:7.) He feared lest in some particular he had failed to carry out the will of God; lest he might have failed to do the Father's will so perfectly as to attain to glory, honor and immortality; lest his death might be the Second Death. But he was heard in respect to that which he feared, and an angel was sent to give him assurance of his acceptability. As he never feared the Father in the sense of experiencing dread or terror, so should it be with *all* those who love him.

While our text says that we should "work out our own salvation," another Scripture states that the reward which we seek is, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:9.) These two texts, however, are not out of harmony. No Scripture implies that we can be independent of our Lord in the matter of working out our own salvation. The perfect work of Christ is the basis of our own work. Unless he had redeemed us we could have no basis for hope of eternal life.

Hence, our attainment of the prize of our "heavenly calling," based upon certain conditions which we are striving to meet, is not dependent upon our own perfection or anything that we could do. The basis of it is the knowledge of our own imperfection and our acceptance by the Father because of the merit of our great Advocate imputed to us.

It was God who provided for the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; and it is God who has drawn us to himself and who gives us

grace to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in the way of self-sacrifice. While with fear and trembling or, as we have shown, with *great carefulness*, we work out our salvation, we realize the promised grace in every time of need; and we may be confident that our best efforts toward righteousness are acceptable to God only when presented through the merit of the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us by faith. – Heb. 4:16; Eph. 2:8.

