



"Few have won joy without effort."
—Pindar

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Snapshots (Part Two)

In the previous essay, we saw how time-lapse cinematography—such as a five-minute video clip composed of 100,000 slightly different pictures—is a useful way of understanding how each moment of our lives relates to the overall progression. So even though a present "snapshot" of our lives looks dismal, it cannot reveal what happens next. In this vein, the apostle Paul writes to the Philippians with confidence and encouragement, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of [Jesus Christ](#)" ([Philippians 1:3-6](#)). "What happens next," Paul says, is in God's hands, and He finishes what He starts.

In the next chapter, Paul continues his teaching:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is [God](#) who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. ([Philippians 2:12-13](#); emphasis ours)

In these two verses, Paul gives an instruction and then a reason. He builds on the confidence that God would complete His good work by saying that part

of His work is to infuse us with both the will and the means to do our part within this project—for we certainly do have a part. A way that the Creator ensures that His project will succeed is by supplying every necessary resource and tool. J.B. Phillip's translation of the New Testament renders this verse as, "For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and the power to achieve His purpose." *The NET Bible* uses "desire" instead of "will" in this verse. Thus, God gives us both the desire and the power for His tremendous purpose to be accomplished in us.

The reason that Paul gives the Philippians distills down to God's spiritual providence, using it to bolster what he tells them to do: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." The phrase "work out" sometimes causes confusion because it sounds like we are working *for* our salvation. That is not the case at all. Salvation is a gift, not something we earn through works.

Instead, "work out" has the sense of "carry it to the conclusion." In other words, salvation is ours to lose. Once involved in the salvation process, we have to make sure that we do not derail the process by turning away from God. *The Amplified Bible* enhances the phrase "work out" by adding "cultivate, carry out to the goal, and fully complete" (your own salvation).

The next phrase adds "with fear and trembling." Again, *The Amplified Bible* tries to give the sense by suggesting the clarifying phrases "with self-distrust, with serious caution, with tenderness of conscience, with watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might [offend](#) God and discredit the name of Christ."

Fear and trembling are the effects of catching a glimpse of God or of recalling the power we have seen Him exercise. We can carry our part of the salvation process to its divine conclusion only if our minds are solidly fixed on the Author and Finisher of our salvation. If we know God, such a focus cannot help but instill reverential awe and an attitude of submission.

The proper fear of God helps to keep us from wandering off the path, thus it is a hedge as we cultivate salvation. Without reverence and submission, our view and comprehension of God will come up short in some area, and we will have a difficult time completing salvation. But when our Father and His Firstborn Son are squarely in our view, dominating our thoughts, we will let

nothing interfere with God accomplishing His purpose in our lives. Because we trust Him, we will submit to whatever He asks of us. We will keep ourselves so we will not be guilty of neglecting so great salvation. We will seek that next glimpse of God and His work, not for our own glory, but because in seeking it we begin to understand Him and think like Him.

[John 6:29](#) presents a high-level, summarizing answer to the question of what we should do to carry out what God requires: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." Since mainstream Christianity has cheapened many biblical concepts, it is easy to pass right over this verse without grasping what it means. Genuine belief goes far beyond believing that Jesus is the Son of God and that He [died for our sins](#). Those are true things. But in addition to them, genuine belief always involves submission and obedience to God's law and will. It includes committing to, trusting in, relying on, and cleaving to the Creator God as He performs His work.

We can plug these elements back into Christ's statement and expand it. The work that God requires of us is submitting to the Head of the church. It is obeying His instructions and surrendering to His will. God's work for us is to commit ourselves fully to the Messenger and Mediator of the covenant and to rely on Him, even in those times when we are feeling lost, overwhelmed, or profoundly dismayed. Our work is to cleave to Him and to trust that whatever "snapshot" is troubling us is not the end of His creative work. Our work is to decide each day whether we will trust Him or our own limited perception. These responses to God are part of what it means to believe.

As we apply ourselves to this work, our salvation is carried out to its glorious conclusion, not because we are doing it, but because God is doing it and we are yielding to Him. He is helping us to come into alignment with Him, as He achieves the impossible of transforming wretched humanity into His own perfect spiritual image. Considering the material He has to work with, and the limited window of time He has to fashion each person, it should not surprise us that His work involves pressurized and highly disruptive actions or circumstances.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Works of God](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The idea that the "work of God" is equated with "preaching the gospel around the world as a witness" severely limits the awesome scope of God's work. If God ever stopped working, the whole universe would come apart, and we would cease. Most of God's works are behind the scenes and invisible. The Psalms corroborate that God's work is awesome and unfathomable, producing a motivating fear that prompts right action (wisdom). We need to see God working in every aspect of our lives, realizing that all of these works are for our benefit. In contrast to ours, God's works are entirely holy and on the highest level of good, love, and faithfulness, aimed at expediting entry into His family. The gospel must not only be preached, it must also be believed and lived with the help of God's Spirit, leading to spiritual transformation (composed of holy, righteous character) into salvation and eternal life.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Is the Christian Required To Do Works? \(Part Four\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The Bible makes it very plain that salvation is by grace, but it is also clear that we are 'created in Christ Jesus for good works' (Ephesians 2:10). Having explained justification, John Ritenbaugh tackles the process of sanctification, showing that the far greater part of God's saving work in us occurs *after* baptism!

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