

Remarkable Salvation! Its Timing and Nature

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Phil 1:6-7 NASB

In addition to being persecuted because of the gospel (1:27-30), the Christians at Philippi were contending for the faith as false teachings promoting reliance on the flesh were impacting the church (3:1-3). Furthermore, pressures from these conditions appear to have been threatening the unity of the body (1:27; 2:1-4, 14; 4:2). The apostle Paul learned of their condition through Epaphroditus, who was initially sent to Paul with a gift of support from the believers at Philippi (4:18). Paul actually referred to Epaphroditus as their messenger (2:25; literally, apostle in the Gk.). After Epaphroditus recovered from a severe illness that was brought on by his service for Christ, Paul sent him back to the church at Philippi with this letter we now call Philippians (2:25-30).

Paul opened this epistle with a truth which served both as a foundation for the rest of the exhortations of this epistle and a great encouragement to the believers at Philippi, as well as all those who have been granted the precious salvation found in the gospel of Jesus Christ;

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Phil 1:6 NASB

An Unshakeable Confidence

Paul began by stating his confidence in the truth contained in our verse. He was not merely humanly hopeful but fully persuaded that God would complete the good work which He began in the believers at Philippi. Such confidence rests on absolute certainty and absolute certainty can rest on nothing less than that which is absolutely certain. In this case, that which is absolutely certain is the fact that that which God begins He finishes. Unlike us, God does not start a project only to be overwhelmed by some circumstance that prevents Him from accomplishing what He initially intended. God is all-knowing (omniscience) so He is not caught off guard by some unexpected condition. Because God is all-powerful (omnipotent) He will not tire or encounter something too difficult preventing Him from accomplishing that which He started. Essentially, as Job proclaimed, no purpose of God's can be thwarted. Paul knew this about God and that knowledge brought Paul much confidence as he remembered the saints of Philippi and their participation in the gospel (1:3-5). His confidence would become instrumental in encouraging these Philippian believers to continue in the faith.

In this single verse Paul communicates three aspects of the salvation possessed by all of the people of God, while at the same time conveying the remarkable nature of salvation but first, he states emphatically that God's work of saving is a work that God began as opposed to a work that was started by the person believing. As a matter of biblical fact and declared by Paul a second time in this epistle, it is God Who grants belief in Christ to a person (Phil. 1:29). It is not the believer who by believing positions himself or herself in Christ but God Who puts a person in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30) at which time that person having been granted faith by the author and finisher of faith (Heb. 12:2) believes.

The Work is Good

The very next point regarding salvation in Philippians 1:6 is the fact that salvation is a good work. Christian, God's work in you is **good**. Salvation is not merely good because it will result in good. It is not good because at times it produces good emotions in you. It is not good because it brings pleasant circumstances. It is good first and foremost because it is from God, Who alone is good (Lk. 18:19) and nothing can come from Him but that which is good (James 1:17). God is good and does good (Psalm 119:68). Thus, salvation is good because it is anchored not in the recipient but in the very nature of God himself. Therefore, all **components, and consequently, all aspects, all influences, and all accomplishments** of God's work in salvation are good.

The Good Components of God's Work

There are multiple **components** of God's good work of salvation, some of which are described in Romans 8:29-30 and others in Ephesians 1:1-14, i.e., election, predestination, called, and justification. As we examine Philippians 1:6, we are concerned with only three—*regeneration sanctification* and *glorification*.

Regeneration reveals the goodness of God's sovereignty, grace, mercy, and compassion on those who otherwise were helpless, ungodly, sinners, subject to God's wrath (Romans 5:6-10; 9:10-16; Ephesians 2:1-4). Resulting from regeneration is *sanctification*. Sanctification reveals the goodness of God's care as He comforts chastens and thus conforms to the image of Christ those He regenerates (Hebrews 12:4-12). Then out of sanctification comes the finished work of *glorification*, wherein God displays the goodness of His faithfulness as He brings to fruition His promise to cause all things to work together for good to those who both love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). In these three components of salvation are contained:

- The good **aspects** of God's work of salvation as it encompasses the Christian's past, present and future.
- The good **influences** of God's work of salvation as it brings peace, hope, joy, comfort to the otherwise miserable.
- The good **accomplishments** of God's work as He fulfills His promises and conforms a people to the image of His Son and thus reveals His glory.

Salvation Past

The first aspect of salvation was the beginning which occurred in the past when the Philippians initially heard the gospel and believed. Acts 16 records Paul's first encounter with the Philippians (Acts 16:9-40). It was at this time that God granted them to believe in Christ (1:29).

For all Christians salvation has a beginning and for all believers that beginning was in the past. No one has always been a believer. Generally speaking, although some Christians are born into a Christian family, no Christians are born Christians. For those Christians born and raised in Christian homes, external changes such as listening to and reading the Bible, attending church, being involved in biblically wholesome activities, etc., may have changed very little after becoming a believer. It may even be difficult for some of these who became Christians at a very young age to remember the internal spiritual difference and thus the beginning of their salvation. There was nevertheless, a beginning point in their salvation. Essentially, for all Christians there was a time when they were not reconciled to God and then, by His grace a time when God birthed them into His kingdom and they did know Him. Whether minutes ago or years, the point

in time when God brings new spiritual life to a person's spiritually dead soul marks the beginning of his or her salvation and because this occurred in the past it is referred to as salvation past.

The Nature of Salvation Past

As important as is the aspect of salvation so also is the nature of that salvation. Notice Philippians 1:6 says that God began the good work. Even though Paul first brought the Gospel to Philippi notice that Paul did not say (referring to himself) that it was he who started the work, rather "He [God] who began..." Christian, you did not start the work of salvation, your parents did not begin it. Sunday school teachers, pastors or other preachers did not begin the work, although all of these may have been instrumental in communicating the gospel to you, it was God Who began salvation in your life. Even your belief in Christ was not something that you had to muster up within yourself but according to what Paul told these believers at Philippi, it was God Who granted to you for Christ's sake, your belief in Christ. In essence, God and God alone started your salvation when He caused you to be born again by His Word. This aspect of salvation is called *regeneration*. Because regeneration is a work of God alone it is referred to as a *monergistic* work, which means *the work of one*—in this case the single work of God birthing you into His kingdom. Just as you did nothing to effect your natural birth you did nothing to effect your spiritual birth. Consider these additional verses that explicitly state this fact: John 1:12-13; Romans 9:10-16; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 12:2.

The fact that God starts salvation should bring every believer great comfort because as the verse goes on to explain God will finish it! As already noted, God's purpose cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2). He will not begin something and later, for whatever reason, fail to accomplish it. Rather, God, as He Himself stated, will accomplish all of His good pleasure (Isaiah 46:10 and Philippians 2:13).

Salvation Present

This brings us to the second aspect of salvation—salvation present. By the phrase, "... will perfect it until..." Philippians 1:6 communicates to every believer the fact that God continues to work in his or her life. God started the work in the past and He is still working at this moment. The apostle reaffirmed this fact to the Philippian Christians when he wrote in 2:12, "... for it is God Who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." The fact that God is *at work* points to the present. God did not merely start a work and then leave it. No, God is this very moment *at work* in every Christian.

The Nature of Salvation Present

This present aspect of salvation is called *sanctification*. Sanctification is that process in which each believer is presently being conformed to Christ's image. Conformity to the image of Christ takes place as Christians are transformed by the Word of God as they take God's Word into their minds and walk in obedience to it (John 17:17; Romans 12:1-2). The many exhortations to Christians found in the book of Philippians (Phil. 1:27-28; 2:2-5, 12, 14-16; 3:1-2, 17; 4:1-8) and the rest of the Bible constitute the means by which God is currently working to conform His people to Christ's image. Through the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit believers obey God's exhortations and thus work out their salvation (Phil. 2:12).

Believers are not working for salvation but from salvation. The present work of sanctification is the direct and necessary result of the work of regeneration which God accomplished in the past. Therefore, by absolutely no means can sanctification be separated from regeneration. However, because there are differences between *regeneration* and *sanctification* they can be distinguished.

The first difference is between an **event** and a **process**. Regeneration is a single event. As an **event** regeneration occurs instantaneously one time. You can only be regenerated one time. However, sanctification is a **process**. God starts the process of sanctification the moment He regenerates a person, and as Paul says in Phil. 1:6 God continues it, "... until the day of Christ Jesus." As a Christian you are being sanctified right now.

The second distinction between *regeneration* and *sanctification* is in the difference between **not cooperating** and **cooperating**. The past work of regeneration was the work of God alone without the believer's cooperation. Yet, the present work of sanctification involves both the believer and God working together. The Bible teaches us that prior to regeneration all were dead in sins (Ephesians 2:1). By this we understand that believers could not make themselves born again or even cooperate with God to be born again. However, subsequent to regeneration (Past Work of God alone), believers do cooperate with God in the work He continues in their lives. This present work of sanctification is referred to as a *synergistic* work—a corporate work, where the person born of God (regenerate) works together (cooperates) with God.

While we are working with God in the sanctification process we must be careful to remember we are not working independent of God. Sometimes well meaning Christians will describe the sanctification process as "God doing His part and Christians doing their part." This description conjures up the idea of independence and is not entirely true. Notice that in Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi He did not go so far as to describe the sanctification process as a completely independent work between God and a Christian. Instead, he indicated that our work is dependent on God working in us when he wrote,

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure."

NASB Philippians 2:12-13

In these words the apostle communicated that our obedience of cooperating with God in the sanctification process is dependent on and intimately related to God continuing His work in us. In other words, we are not now after having been born of God, saving ourselves. This should bring us great comfort. At times the presence of sin poses a hindrance and thus an imperfection in our work. Sin's continued presence in the believer can be discouraging even for the most mature believer, nevertheless God's work continues flawlessly, thus empowering us to continue in the process of sanctification in spite of sin's presence.

Salvation Future

The third and final aspect of salvation encompassed in Philippians 1:6 is that time when salvation is completed. Notice in Philippians 1:6 that the work which God began continues until the day of Christ. The *day of Christ* points to that future time when the work which God began in the past and is working in the present will be completed. The phrase *day of Christ* appears three times in this epistle (1:6, 10 and 2:16). Based on 1:6 the phrase speaks specifically to the completion of the salvation of the believer and encompasses Christ's return (3:20 and 4:5).

The Nature of Salvation Future

This future aspect of salvation is called *glorification* (Rm. 8:29-30). Glorification is the finished work of salvation at which time the believer is completely conformed in both **spirit** and **body** to Christ's image. Not only will the Christian's spirit be without sin at the time of glorification but he or she will also have an immortal body that will be without the affects of sin (Phil. 3:20-21). This is the purpose toward which both God and Christians are presently working. Glorification is the event which all creation awaits (Romans 8:19). It is being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ that will accomplish the ultimate purpose God has for every believer— ascribing glory to God!

In summary,

Salvation:

- Is a work God begins and completes
- Is a good work
- Involves the past the present and the future
- Will not be thwarted
- Will be completed
- Will ascribe glory to God

Thus, the Christian can have confidence knowing that he or she is in God's care and regardless of the trials encountered, God will strengthen the believer enabling him or her to come through the trial further conformed to the image of Christ (Philippians 4:13).

Dear Christian, meditate on these truths of Philippians 1:6 and no doubt, the many more truths contained in the verse. As you do, may the blessed and only Sovereign Lord enrich you with wisdom so as to enable you to walk in a way that honors Him.

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