

# Exploring Salvation's Deposits

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of working out our salvation with fear and trembling, and the confidence that comes from knowing that God is at work in us to will and to act according to His good purpose.*

**Duration:** 51:20

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 2:12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Peter 1:15-16

**Topics:** "Salvation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of working out one's salvation. He uses the analogy of a person being given all the materials and plans to build a house, and emphasizes that God has provided everything we need for our spiritual growth. The speaker then highlights the power of God in raising Jesus from the dead, emphasizing that God is at work in our sanctification. He concludes by urging the audience to examine their own spiritual progress and to continue working out their salvation with fear and trembling.

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## Transcript

As many, if not all, the people of Knox know, English is not my mother tongue. Probably most of you will have gathered that by this time. One incident that I remember in our little country school relates to a boy bringing a letter one morning, which had been written in English, by a distant relative in Australia.

And he brought this letter to the teacher and asked the teacher, could he please tell him, so that he could tell his mother and father what a sentence in the letter really meant. A sentence read in English, saying that some gold deposits had been discovered on their property and they were about to excavate it. Now that's simple enough to you Canadian English people, but for us Welsh folk, at least he couldn't quite understand what these deposits were.

I was reminded of that when my heart was drawn and my mind, my whole being was drawn afresh to the words of Paul, written in Philippians 2 verses 12 and 13. And so I entitled the message this morning, Exploring Salvation Deposits. Therefore my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Exploring Salvation Deposits. These words embody one of the greatest and most comprehensive short statements ever made,

it would seem, on the subject of sanctification or of growing toward Christian maturity.

The Apostle's massive mind and his equally large heartedness and pastoral concerns all combine here. And the text has featured very largely in Christian biography and of course in the formulating of the theology of salvation. This is a key statement or a key passage.

Now there are just two main things that I would like to try to expound this morning. And I ask you prayerfully to look with me first of all at the terms of the command which the Apostle utters and then the confidence that he inspires in his readers. You see the Apostle was a pastor.

A pastor of Christian people and Christian churches. And he was really concerned that the young Christians in Philippi should learn to grow up. That's what he's talking about.

And all this is related to that. Theology has an end in view. Ultimately it is the glory of God.

More immediately it is the good of men and women. That those who know not Christ should come to a knowledge of him and that those who know him should grow up and deepen such knowledge and experience. Now look with me first then as we come to the beginning of a new term as it were.

The beginning of our fall term together. What's the purpose of the ministry? What's our goal as a congregation? What are we here for? What's the meaning? What's the purpose of our spending so much time around the word of God? Look first of all at the command which Paul addresses here. You find it in these words in verse 12.

Continue he says according to the NIV. Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Pauline imperatives are always preceded by very clearly defined indicatives.

He never asks people to do anything without first indicating the resources that are available for obedience to his commands. Paul does not neither does Jesus nor any of the other New Testament writers expect us to do things that are unreasonable. And before the commands are uttered before the standard is exposed they invariably remind us of the basis of such commands and the good reason there is for Christian people obeying such commands.

Before Paul comes to the present command in our text therefore he has squarely and clearly reminded the Philippians of his confidence in the fact that God has already begun in them his own good work. That's back in verse 6 of chapter 1. Being sure, being confident of this very thing that God has begun in you a good work or his good work. Now that of course is the work of salvation.

And this is what a Christian really is. A Christian is a person in whose life in whose innermost being in whose heart and spirit as well of course as in one's outward behavior God is doing a work and has begun to do a work that only he can do, that is salvation. It's the work of God in the soul of man.

Now Paul assures these good people that it is evident he says that God has begun in you this good work. And so he comes to the command in our text this morning. Now concerning this I want to say two or three things.

First, I would like you to look at the area of experience that concerns the apostle here. Continue to work out your salvation. Your salvation.

The old King James put it even more pointedly I think. Work out your own salvation. The salvation which has already become your very own.

The term salvation is inclusive as it is basic. At times it refers to the divine act whereby guilty sinners are absolved and pardoned of their sins. God for Jesus sake on the basis of the finished work of Christ forgives the whole guilty past and wipes the slate clean and we say that man, that woman, that boy, that girl is served.

It's an act in the past. Paul's word for it is justification. At other times the term salvation has in mind the gradual day-to-day deliverance of the Christian, the new Christian perhaps, however young, however old it matters not, the daily deliverance of a man or a woman from the power, the oppressive tyranny of temptation and sin.

The daily liberation, liberating of the Christian person from the things that would molest and hurt and harm. That is being saved. That is what it means to be saved.

Yet again the same word sometimes has its main reference to the climactic and the consummating aspects of that ongoing work whereby God's people will ultimately be rid of every evil effect upon their lives. Saved from the very presence of sin and perfected in righteousness and in true holiness. This is glorification.

This is what the New Testament sometimes speaks of as glory. That will be glory. It is to be transformed into the likeness of the God of glory.

Now salvation includes the whole three. It is all-inclusive, all-embracing. There's another way of understanding the term.

Sometimes it is spoken of in an objective way as something that has been finished already in history, something that has been done outside of ourselves. We were saved when Jesus Christ died in our stead, died our death, rose again from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand. In the work of Christ authenticated by the Father, sealed by Him, we were saved.

It was finished. It was all done. It is written into history.

Salvation is done and accomplished. Our fathers loved to speak of the finished work of Christ. He did it all.

This is often the backlash against which we make the gospel invitation. Christ has done it all. God has done it all in Christ.

Now you come, we come, and we trust the Christ who finished it all. But salvation is also spoken of as a subjective thing, something going on in a sinner's life that transforms him, makes him a saint and more and more saintly and more and more like his Lord and like his God and like his Creator and renews the image of the Creator in the creature. Now this latter use of the word is what we encounter here.

It is the aspect of salvation which goes on in the life of God's people. Paul addresses them as men and women who have already made the finished salvation wrought by Christ their own. They've by faith claimed it.

They've made it their own. They've embraced it. They've received it.

Use any language you like. But it's their own salvation and each believer can say, mine. God is my God.

Jesus Christ is my Savior. I've made him mine and I trust there is no one in our service this morning who can't say that. Should there be, may I remind you, this may well be God's day and opportunity for you.

This is the day of salvation. Then by the grace of God put your arms around the Savior and claim him as yours today. But the area that concerns Paul here is this.

It's what begins when Christ becomes ours. It's that's what goes on in our hearts, in our minds, in our consciences, in our innermost life ultimately to express itself in our outward behavior. Now the next thing I would like you to notice is the action which he commands.

Continue, he says, to work out the salvation you have made your own. Here is an incisive summons to action. The Christian experience is not all contemplation.

It is not all passive. Of course it has certain passive aspects. We rest upon a finished work.

We trust in a risen reigning Lord. But even our trust is not altogether passive. And here the summons is to do something.

The salvation which God has granted us in Christ desires to be worked out by us. Like the gold mine in that Australian field. Like those deposits of gold.

Our salvation given us in Christ needs to be excavated, worked out and manifest in our lives to the glory of the God who is the God of salvation and the extension of his kingdom and the building up of his church. The faith that first received the gift must now become the work of faith that explores and expresses the content of that personally possessed gift of God in Christ. Now two main ideas appear to underline this command.

First of all the verb to work out may imply if I may quote from one of the scholars to bring something latent into fruition or quote again to express an outward character and conduct what is already an inward principle or reality. We put it like this This is the kind of thing that happens to the seed that is sown in the earth in the springtime. God has first worked something into that seed and only God can do that.

He puts life in the seed according to its kind. You sow a stone and it will not bring forth corn or whatever but into the seed there is something different. God has worked into the seed life according to its own kind and there it lies buried and the farmer has to do certain things in order to work out that which is wrought into the seed that has been sown.

Nature comes to his aid. God comes to work alongside of him in various ways but the command is given to the farmer you work it out or if you prefer this is what happens in cases of coal mining or gold mining go back to our illustration. Something is said to be deposited in the earth but somebody's got to dig down there and tunnel all the way through and excavate and it's a dirty job and it's a difficult job not an easy thing to do but somebody's got to do it to get it up to bring it out to use it and to purify it and what not.

Men who can be addressed as Paul addresses the Philippians as quote saints in Christ Jesus are folk in whose hearts Christ has come to dwell by his spirit and where Christ has come to dwell then all that Christ is and all that he has done everything is there in embryo. Now the command comes to the Christian work out the life of Christ the life of God the life of the spirit in your soul. Work it out our text is a summons to

work that inwrought salvation out as we would excavate a gold mine or whatever.

The same verb work out includes also the idea of bringing something to completion that has been inwrought by God but bringing it to completion just as God having given fertility to the soil then requires us to work it out by cultivating it so too says the apostle Peter God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and then he goes on in 2 Peter chapter 1 he goes on to spend almost the entire last three quarters of the chapter to tell us how we are to work it out what we are to do in order to bring the thing to completion to consummation.

Or it is just as if someone were to bring a lorry load of bricks and cement and timber and all the other components that go to the making of a house and dump the whole thing outside your present residence and hand you a plan telling you how to build a new house and tell you now look here's everything you need every little detail everything you can possibly need to build the house from beginning to end it's all here and here are the plans get on with the job work it out to completion such rich imagery lies behind Paul's command to the Philippians this is the activity to which he calls all God's redeemed people in the text before us and brothers and sisters in Christ this is our primary activity it is to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling if we're not doing that we cannot

serve God in the world in society in our homes in our churches or anywhere else our service depends upon our character and our character needs to be developed and this says Paul is the word and the attitude that must accompany such activity is described as with fear and trembling now let's explain this a little gone forever of course is the dread fear of being eternally lost for those who are saints in Christ Jesus for those in whose hearts God has begun his good work gone forever is the dread of being eternally lost you cannot be eternally lost if God is your God, if Christ is your Savior if the Holy Spirit is your sanctifier if the word of God is your guide you cannot be lost that way as Paul reminds the Colossians your life is hid with Christ in God you can't be lost so it's not the

fear of being lost I remember an old collier in the Ronda Valley teaching me this lesson as a student going from the university to preach there on a Sunday it was in the summer his home was quite a distance from the place where I left the train we saw a little bunny rabbit come out from a cleft in the rock she looked so tiny such a sweet little thing but so tiny, so incapable of looking after herself and he said to me, he was a big man twice my size and a father in God a dear man of God put his arm on my shoulder and he said that little rabbit looks so incapable of looking after itself, doesn't it and whilst it's running around like this it can be shot or caught by somebody like you or me but whilst that little rabbit is in the rock it's as safe as the rock itself I've never forgotten

that whilst it remains in the rock it is as safe as the rock itself brother and sister, if you and I are in Christ then in Christ there is safety and security, there can be nothing else nevertheless this is the point there is in the Christian life a wholesome fear and trembling and I fear sometimes we know next to nothing of this will you say, how can it be if there is no fear of being eternally lost because we have an eternal saviour who has given us the gift of eternal life and has pledged us to be with us eternally never to leave us alone if that is the case, then where is this fear and trembling coming from oh, it's a different thing altogether this is not the fear and trembling of the sinner who is without the saviour but this is the fear and trembling of the saint who has begun to

see the honour and the glory of his saviour and his God and his fear is a different one it's the fear of dishonouring his God it's the fear of dishonouring his saviour it's the fear of not becoming what God has

made it possible for him to become it is the fear of coming short of God's calling do you know anything of that brothers and sisters in Christ do we know anything of this wholesome fear which is the beginning of wisdom it's not a crippling fear, but it's the fear of love it's the fear that is born of worship it's the fear that is born of the knowledge of God in all his greatness and his glory I don't want to dishonour him as a saint, as a child of his I want to please him that's what Paul is getting at men and women of Philippi men and women of Knox and those who are joining us

here this morning I believe that this word comes as a shaft from heaven to you and to me this morning men and women, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling let us manifest to the world we have a concern in our hearts to please God an eagerness in our soul to honour the all honourable God of glory and that brings me to the next thing the second point we turn from the command that Paul has addressed to the confidence that he inspires how can you make a command like this, how can you make a request like this how can you expect in a pagan city expect people to live on this level how is it possible and the great apostle tells us in few words because he says it is God who works in you you can work out your own salvation because God is at work in you but how is God at work in us, in

you well he is at work in you to will and to act according to his own good purpose never was there a higher calling addressed to any man or group of men never was there such confidence expressed in the ability of believing men and women to attain that same high calling never, the explanation is to be found in the fact that the very God who wrought salvation objectively, historically in Christ his son that same God is at work in you experientially by the spirit to work out that same salvation to its conclusion, to its consummation as long as life shall last and he will add the finishing touches when he returns the very God who came and lived and died in Christ his son and is risen again and reigns forever is the very God who has come to live within us to work it out you see this is why we

can be confident and we often fail to see this we think of God coming in Christ, some people don't see God in Christ but most of us do who bear the name Christian we see God in Christ, he came, he lived, he died, he acted he did something that no one else could do marvelous, necessary true but then we don't see this that the God who did all that and accomplished it and completed it all in Christ objectively is now in the hearts of his people none less than he and there can be no greater, none other than he God, the very God who became incarnate in Christ by his spirit has come to dwell in the hearts of the believer and therefore he tells us it doesn't matter how weak you are, how foolish you are you by my grace and my enabling you can work out that salvation which has been given you as a

gift and you can work it out to its consummation and I will give it the finishing touches now let's examine just two or three things briefly first of all, Paul calls attention to the inwardness of the divine presence oh this is something, good people something very elementary and I'm not telling you anything you don't know we preachers are often humbled in this way it has given us to repeat what others have said so many times and better than ourselves but this is something that must be repeated must, we must be reminded of it over and over again it is God who works in you now he's addressing Christians don't forget, and this is the statement God is at work in you and it's because of that I'm commanding you to live up to this standard the same God who was in Christ procuring our salvation

objectively is in the Christian enabling him to work it out in experience we need ever to remember this most glorious truth when our Lord Jesus Christ was introducing his disciples to the then future paraclete that was to take his place the other paraclete, that was the word he used of the Holy Spirit a paracletos, one to come alongside of you the word has been translated in the New Testament quite variously

counselor, comforter and what not there are so many ways of translating the term and they all probably have some shade some aspect of the meaning of the term and they represent it but Jesus supplemented the implication of that very term he supplemented it with the assurance that the other paraclete, the Holy Spirit who would take his place among his disciples among his church would be

and this is a very big little word would be in God's people listen to these words John 14 verses 16 and 17 I will ask the Father and he will give you another paracletos another counselor says the NIV to be with you forever the spirit of truth the world cannot accept him because it neither sees him and the world can only receive what it sees and doesn't know him and the world can only receive what it knows something about but you know him for he lives with you God is with you and will be in you oh don't let's miss that precious little word the God who in Christ had come alongside of these men is now saying that the other paraclete is not just coming to walk alongside of them external to themselves but he with equal dignity and equal in his divinity is going to indwell them is going to be

in them indeed our Lord goes on further you remember in verse 23 we read if anyone loves me he will obey my teaching my father will love him and notice we will come to him and make our home with him we will come to him and make our home with him what does that mean? it means nothing less than this that the triune God in some mysterious sense is coming to indwell the Christian man and woman this glorious truth is basic to Christian growth and development it's the very spring of all our hopes and aspirations and you will find that Paul especially makes much of it but not only Paul other writers in the New Testament read Paul's letter to the Ephesians for example and some of his prayers chapter 3 for example he prays that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and I pray that you

being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the saints and grasp how wide and high is the love of God which passes knowledge etc that Christ may dwell in your heart addressing the Colossians Paul says Christ in you is the hope of glory it's the same notion the first reason for Paul's confidence in the eventual fulfillment of God's purpose for his people is that all the redeemed are individually indwelt by God himself Father, Son and Holy Spirit you and I may look at ourselves in the mirror if we would and however, whatever we think of our own bodies you may say of your body it is the temple of the Holy Ghost God dwells in here then Paul also appears to stress not only that one fact of the inwardness of the divine presence but of the intensity of God's indwelling

in his people and it's very relevant to the issue in question it is God who works in you to will and to act now mark those words God works God is at work the divine indweller is no inactive guest within the hearts of his people he is positively and consistently at work there it's a marvelous word this he is operating energain is the Greek word right at the center of our very being God is working in you believer unless he is then his good work has not begun seek his face if there is no evidence that God is at work in your soul, brother, sister, friend whoever you are, seek his face seek he the Lord while he may be found a Christ not in us is a Christ not for us said Murray McChain years ago unless God has begun a work in you doing something to your conscience as well as your mind and your

will and your emotions and every other aspect of your inner life changing and transforming, making a new person of you then brother, sister, friend seek his face because the God who enters the hearts of his people is a God who is active there, he comes into work our God is a working God I hear some folk refer to working people and they mean a certain class of people in the community sometimes it's not spoken very kindly I want to tell you something, our God is a working God he's a God at work and when he comes into your heart and mind he comes to do something he's not passive he's not coming in just to see what's

going on and to look at you as it were and to be a spectator of what you are doing or what you are thinking or what you are planning he's coming to do something Paul used the

word to describe God's operations within his people which does not simply stress the uniquely divine nature of the action but also this it's efficaciousness, it cannot fail God is working in such a powerful way that what he is doing cannot fail let me pause with this for a moment if you glance at the New Testament use of this word Energine you will see what it is meant this for example, I just give two illustrations this is the might with which God expressed himself in raising his son from the dead when everything seemed done and Jesus of Nazareth was beaten and defeated I don't need to go into the whole story the Jews, misled had sought the verdict against him and got it the Roman soldiers carried out what Pilate required of them and he was to be crucified they nailed him to the cross

they left him there the spear struck his side and forth with their gushed out blood and water he was dead loving hands prepared the body buried him in a borrowed tomb which was sealed by the Romans against all intruders from outside and against the very least possibility of the inhabitant of that tomb himself coming out again there was no way out there was no way in he was doomed you can almost hear the anthems of the unbelieving community of the day singing their hallelujahs Jesus is rid of but by the mighty Energine the power of God he raised him from the dead who tore the bars away who raised his son from the dead the almighty omnipotent God who sent him and who was in him Paul uses that very word here it's a word that refers to divine power moving against any other power and in the

second place when it does so move it not only wins the day but effectively, efficaciously, gloriously an illustration of that just an illustration is found in Paul's usage of the word in Galatians in Galatians 2 verse 8 where he is referring to his own apostleship but he puts it like this for God who was at work in the ministry of Peter constituting him as an apostle or working with him as an apostle whatever it may mean in that context God who was at work in the ministry of Peter making him an apostle enabling him to be an apostle was also at work, the same word in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles now the point is this it was awfully difficult to take a man like Simon we've been through this haven't we? and some of us have seen it it was the most difficult thing to take a man

like Simon rough, rugged, jewel that he was and say to him one day you will become Cephas you'll become the rock man I give to you the keys of the kingdom, you'll become an apostle you'll open the kingdom of heaven to men and women you'll be my servant what a remarkable thing to say you see the only basis upon which Jesus could say that that his power is almighty power what he begins he is able to finish, to conclude and the same with Paul himself the power that was evident in Peter was also evident in me it found me I was altogether opposing the faith and the faithful, I was moving in the opposite direction I had to be completely transformed and he had to turn me around not only physically but inwardly spiritually in my mind in the whole of my thinking and emotions I had to be turned

upside down but God was at work in me see the point this is power that never fails oh as in a campaign as in a war some incidents may appear to be failures but the end is sure God is at work in you now says the apostle because of that I have confidence that it is possible for you to work out your salvation with fear and trembling God is at work and this is what he's doing he's doing two things, I can't stay with them but I must mention them God is at work in you, the intensity of his presence in his people is exemplified in his working efficaciously both to produce inward decision to do right and generating a corresponding action to will and to do God is at work both to will and to do of his or his own good pleasure not to wish but not that we should wish to do the right things there are

so many of us who only come to that stage you know oh we wish we were better oh we wish we were different but we've never come to the place where we really will says Paul where God is doing his good work he comes and he brings us to the place where we will will to do what God wills just as Jesus did my will is to do the will of him that sent me he deals with the will, he strengthens the will he straightens the will our God is a God who enables us to will the right thing not just to wish for it in a wishy-washy way see that's what makes martyrs that's what makes martyrs of men who knowingly face tyranny and death for Christ not accidentally but willingly how can they do it? well how can they will to do it? well God is at work in them both to will and then to do to set the will straight and

then to gear the soul to action oh brothers and sisters we have a great God and it's because of that we have a great salvation and Paul calls for a very deep consistent industry in the matter of working out this great salvation with fear and trembling and Paul calls for a very deep consistent industry in the matter of working out this great salvation with fear and trembling, see it may, I close with this it may take us by surprise some of us might have concluded if God is so great and if in any sense salvation was finished, was wrought in Christ then there's nothing for us to do just sit down and enjoy ourselves and be passive well let's sing we're on the way to glory hallelujah, well let's sing by all means but that's false logic according to the apostle Paul God has all power and he's

come to work in you but if God is at work in you in your sanctification you will become a co-operator with God and this is the evidence that we have been born again this is the evidence that we are new creatures this is the evidence that God is indeed in our souls that we are co-operators with him and we are obedient to his commands and we begin and keep going working out our own salvation with awe and wonder fear and trembling I ask you in my master's name as I address myself with the same question where are we at this morning on this holiday weekend, labor weekend where are we at is there any real work of God going on in our lives in my life in yours that cannot be explained purely in terms of my upbringing of culture of history of circumstances that are objective to myself or of the

pressure of community upon me is there something going on in me that can only be explained in terms of God at work now that's what it means to be a witness in the New Testament sense you shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be witnesses and whatever else is involved it involves this men will see something of God at work in the humblest of his people, God at work will you pray with me this morning that he will continue that work in us and if he has not begun it that he will begin it in every one of us and that we may help one another to cooperate with God in all his grace and wisdom and glory and power to the end that he may be glorified and his work in us perfected let us pray, God our Father your word is the lamp unto our feet and the light unto

our path that when it falls across our way and penetrates our souls it invariably discovers there that concerning which we are ashamed and it is true again this morning it is true of the preacher if not of those in the pew one is ashamed that with all the privileges of life one has not responded the more fully to your presence in the soul and your provisions of grace we confess that we are what we are just now where we are spiritually we confess to you our sins and shortcomings and at the end of our morning worship we come begging of you oh God our Father that by the spirit and the word you will enable us to grow and develop and mature that we may be witnesses in a world that knows you not indeed we would pray the words of the hymn finish then thy new creation pure and spotless let us be

let us find your great salvation perfectly restored in thee continue your work in us take firmer hold of us and pursue us on our way and may your presence ever make us more like him in whom your image was

fully seen we ask it in his name Amen

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