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SALVATION AS A WORK.

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"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."—PHILIPPIANS 1:6.

WORK is the subject of this text. The world is full of busy work; the din of toil and the hum of industry is ever in our ears. But there is another work. Simultaneous with this work of the world, mingling with it, but rising above it in grandeur and importance, is another work—a divine work—a work for the salvation of souls. It is a work that has a strange secret of power. It is unseen and mysterious. It interpenetrates the world's work and often overreaches it. It draws men more effectually than the attractions of the world's enjoyments. It often separates them from worldly gains by the motive of more enduring riches. This work is going on busily amidst the world's active industries. Its agencies are organized; wherever men gather in the market-place, there is one to say, "Go ye into the vineyard." A

divine message is meeting men in every avenue of life. The merchant hears it on 'Change, and stops to repeat the mysterious sound, "Lay up for yourself treasures in heaven." The farmer stops his plow in the furrow as he listens to the strange words, "Break ye up the fallow ground, and sow to yourselves in righteousness." The workman amidst the din and clank of machinery hears a still small voice, more penetrating than the din of toil, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" The swift trains freighted with a nation's merchandise bear with them the agencies of the Gospel. The ships that carry the world's commerce carry also the missionary and the Bible to extend this work to the ends of the earth.

This work is not only, like the world's work, external, but also invisible, secret, and mysterious. It is a work in the souls of men, quickening, renewing, transforming. It generates a new life, forms a new character, and lifts man into alliance with God. Oh, there is nothing more sublime than to think that amidst all the noise and turmoil of the outward world this busy and mysterious work is silently going on in the souls of men, assimilating them to the divine image, and preparing upon this earth the great family of God and the kingdom of heaven.

This is the work that is presented to us in the text. *Salvation as a work* is here described in a minute and beautiful detail.

I. *It is a good work.* "He who hath begun a *good work* in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

It is good in its experience. Nothing is so delightful as salvation, nothing else brings such present enjoyment, or so meets the wants and desires of our troubled and agitated spirits. In every other work we wander in disquietude through the circuit of humanity, but this brings us at once to the Creator, and, having found the center of rest and satisfaction, we wander no more.

One distinguished for knowledge and wisdom records his experience of salvation thus: "So long as I strove after earthly good and earthly wisdom there was in this striving nothing but restlessness and disquiet; but now in the hope of salvation all my cares and desires have become so tranquilized that there is continual peace." To this he adds: "I long thought that life ceased when religion began; but, behold! I have found that then first I lived when I began to love" (Tholuck). Such, indeed, is salvation with every one in whom the good work is truly experienced. They only then begin to live. The past, with all that they called pleasure and

enjoyment, seems unworthy to be called life. The new life is so much higher and nobler, its pulses beat with such an intenser thrill, and its issues of love, joy and hope impart such a present, conscious bliss, that they seem as if waking up for the first time to real existence. The sun shines brighter, the earth is robed in new beauty, the sky glitters with a richer glory; existence assumes a grander aspect, action a higher aim, hope a nobler object, and the soul a sublimer destiny.

Such and so good is salvation in its actual enjoyment. The language of the Prophet, in the utterance of his own experience, is the language of every one whose heart thrills under a felt sense of salvation: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61: 10).

II. *This good work is, secondly, described in the text as an inward or internal work.* "He which hath begun a good work *in you*." It is not a work without, but a *work within*.

When some visitors were admiring the books of the large library of a pious prelate, he replied, "One thought of devotion outweighs them all." This was a fine expression of the superior value of that which is inward and spiritual. True religion has

its visible and external expressions, but they have no value unless they spring from a devout heart. Our Lord pointed out this distinction when he commended the gift of the widow's mite. Externally and visibly the gift was insignificant, but internally and spiritually it was of great value, because it expressed the devout self-sacrifice of the widow's heart.

It is a great and sublime fact that the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, dwells in the Christian. True religion is the new life with which he quickens the soul; hence religion is essentially a work within. All the issues of the Christian life must come from the heart. Redemption is a work without, a work wrought for us; but *salvation* is a good work wrought in us. If the external work of redemption is not appropriated and experienced in its internal efficacy, it is all in vain. Obvious as all this is, it is strangely misconceived and perverted. In this age of externalism, when so much thought and energy is expended upon that which is outward and material, it seems impossible to get people to understand the inwardness of true religion.

It is misconceived by many *who mistake rites and ceremonies for true religion*. It is the old mistake of the Pharisees, which our Lord so strongly re-

buked, repeated age after age. They substitute the form for the power of godliness. The Scriptures everywhere teach that true religion consists in truth and purity in the inward parts. The Apostle Paul warns us that nothing outward is of any avail except as connected with a devout heart; that prophecy, alms-giving, and even martyrdom, are nothing without love. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13: 3). "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17).

The inwardness of true religion is also misconceived *by those who mistake morality for religion*. Of these there are several classes. There are rationalistic theories of ethics which sever morality from religion, making religion simply a sentiment and moral conduct the essential thing. The result is to kill both morality and religion. There are some who confound the work of reformation with the work of salvation. They imagine that because they have reformed some of their external habits they are Christians. This is often a simple mistake springing from an ignorance or misconception of the truth of God. There are others (and in this age of external action it is to be feared it is a

large class) who give themselves so exclusively to the activities of what is called Christian and benevolent work that they neglect to realize the inwardness of true religion in their own experience, or to develop those interior elements of spiritual life without which they are "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." There are still others who seem to have the idea that morality will produce religion in their hearts; and by entering upon the practice of moral duties they indulge the expectation that this will lead to an experience of religion in their own souls.

All these classes agree in one thing—in overlooking or ignoring the inwardness of true religion; failing to realize that it is a good work wrought in them by the grace of God. They are all attempting to make the fruit good without first making the tree good, or to purify the stream without first cleansing the fountain. All these efforts to externalize religion are included in our Lord's rebuke when he said: "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he, that made that which is without, make that which is within also?" (Luke 11 : 39, 40.) Dr. James W. Alexander said, speaking to young men: "Inward, inward we must go for the

true elaboration of gracious virtues. We may give ourselves too exclusively to visible activities, and have to take up the lamentation, 'They have made me keeper of vineyards, but mine own vineyard I have not kept.' It is a great moment in a man's life when he awakes to the conviction that of all the works he has to perform the greatest is within his own breast."

III. *This good work is, thirdly, described in the text as a divine work.* "Being confident of this very thing, that *he*" (that is, God) "which hath *begun* a good work in you will *perform* it until the day of Jessu Christ." It is a work which *God begins, performs* (or carries forward), and *finishes* in the day of Jesus Christ. It seems rather singular, in view of so distinct an inspired announcement, that this should be precisely the point of divergence between the two great theological systems which have divided the Church for so many ages. The question is, Who begins the work of salvation? The Arminian answers, Man himself; the first movement of the soul to God begins in the self-determining power of the human will. The Calvinist, upon the other hand, maintains that the work begins with God, and owes all its efficacy, in its origin, continuance and consummation, to divine grace. It is easy to see on which side of the question the Apos-

tle stands, when in the text he attributes the whole work from first to last to the power of God. Indeed, if the Bible be received as the word of God, and its simple teachings be left unadulterated by the interpretations of a worldly philosophy, there can be no doubt upon this point.

That salvation is the good *work of God* follows, first, *from its internal character*. If it be a work *in us*, then he alone who made the soul can enter in to rectify and reconstruct it.

Secondly, *from the nature of the work*. It is a creation. Who can create but he who spake and it was done? It is a resurrection. Who but God can raise the dead? "You hath *he* quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). The soul thus raised is then illuminated, and who but he who commanded light to shine out of darkness can shine into our minds, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ"?

Thirdly, this follows *from the Scripture descriptions of salvation as the work of God in all its issues*. Its *origin is in God*. "Brethren beloved of the Lord," says the Apostle, "we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13, 14). Its *source is in God*. "He hath saved us,

and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). *Its appointment is of God.* "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). *Its execution is of God.* "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). *Its grant is of God.* "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). *Its efficacy is of God.* "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God" (2 Cor. 5:5). *Its continuance is of God.* "He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). Accordingly we read that the whole company of the redeemed from the earth, out of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, as they stand before the throne and the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands, cry with a loud voice: "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9, 10).

IV. *Again, let us notice as a fourth point that salvation is described in our text as a progressive work.* "He who hath begun a good work in you will per-

form it." The idea is that of a continuous, progressive performance. He will carry it on to its ultimate completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

All the works of God are progressive. The creation of the world was not instantaneous and perfect, but gradual and progressive, as the plastic hand of the Creator wrought amid chaos bringing beauty and order out of confusion, molding the world, spreading out the heavens, fashioning the stars, ordaining the sun and moon, garnishing the earth, till all stood forth in the perfection of beauty, and he pronounced it good. Revelation in like manner progressed continuously from the first dim dawn of antediluvian promise through the faint, glimmering morning of the patriarchal age and the increasing light of the prophetic period to the full-orbed, noontide effulgence of the cross of Christ.

Such also is the law of gradual and continuous progress in the work of grace; hence it is compared in the Scriptures to everything that is characterized by growth. *To the principle of vegetation*, as described by our Lord: "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." It is like the mustard-seed, in its first appearance the smallest, and in its ultimate development the greatest, of all trees. In like manner it is compared *to light*,

growing brighter and brighter to the perfect day. *To life*, at first infantile, but the babe in Christ grows to the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. *To the progress of industrial labor*: "Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2: 5). *To the outgrowth of mechanical skill*: "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God" (2 Cor. 5: 5).

Notice for a moment the point of this last figure. As the mechanic forges his bar and works it by a progressive process for a specific purpose, so "he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God." If a piece of fine, polished, flexible steel could tell the history of the processes which have made it what it is, it would have to tell of much work done upon it, and of a great change wrought in it. It was once a dark, impure mass, scarcely to be distinguished from the stones with which it was mixed and incorporated. It would have to tell of the force that dug it out of darkness, of the blows that broke it into pieces, of the crucible in which it was closely imprisoned, of the heaps of charcoal that overlaid and of the intense fires melting the metal, changing the charcoal into a subtle gas, and forcing the new element to mix with the whole substance of the iron. It would have to tell, too, how again and again it had to

feel the heavy blows of the hammer, the heat of the furious fire, the plunge into hissing, steaming water, and how it was not till after much protracted labor that the dull, heavy, brittle iron became steel, rivaling in brightness the polished silver, and in toughness the strongest cable. In like manner the Christian is wrought by God himself for his present work and future destiny. All the trials and temptations, all the sorrows and suffering, all the various changes and chances of the Christian's life, are just the blows of the hammer or the flames of the furnace that in God's providence and grace are preparing him for his future bliss. So that if a saint already bright and glittering in his inheritance of light could tell us of the processes by which he was made what he is, he would have to tell how he was dug out of the hole of the pit, of many a melting crucible, of many a plunge into the water, of many a blow of the hammer, of the fires that have been piled over and around him in the furnace of affliction, driving into his softened spirit that divine principle which has changed, not indeed the substance, but the character and qualities of his nature, giving strength instead of weakness, and infusing the grace that bends to the will of God. He would have to tell of these processes long continued and again reapplied, of fire

kindled upon fire and blow succeeding blow, and that it was not until after much working and progressive refining that he was made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

V. Our text furnishes another invaluable point of doctrinal instruction. *This blessed, internal, divine, progressive work is here described as a work that will assuredly be completed.* Of this the Apostle gives us a double expression of his confidence. "*Being confident of this very thing,*" it is a point about which there can be no room for doubt that "*he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ.*"

1. *This strong confidence of the Apostle is based upon the character of God.* The simple fact that God hath begun a good work was the assurance that he would complete it. If salvation were the work of man, if either the beginning, continuance, or termination of the work depended upon ourselves, there could be no ground of certainty or confidence in the matter. But the simple fact that God has begun a good work in us leaves no room to doubt but he will carry it on to its uttermost perfection. God abandons nothing that he undertakes. There are no unfinished worlds or systems, no half-made or forsaken works of his hands. Besides this, there can be no reason why he should

begin such a work and then abandon it. It cannot be because he has no power to complete it, or because there are more enemies to be overcome than he had supposed. There is no evidence in the works of creation of any change of plan, or of his having forsaken what he began, from disappointment or disgust. He tells us himself what judgment should be formed of a builder who, having begun at great expense to erect a house, should leave it unfinished. Shall we, then, suppose that God, who hath purchased our souls with the blood of his dear Son, and has laid in our hearts the foundation of his spiritual temple, will at last leave *that* for the habitation of devils which he has been so long forming for himself? The very supposition is absurd, and its maintenance blasphemous. To suppose that God would leave unfinished a work which he has already begun is to impute weakness and imperfection to the all-perfect and ever-blessed God.

2. *While this confidence might rest with perfect security upon the basis of the divine character, it has also for its foundation the sure Word of divine promise.* These promises are of two kinds:

(1) That nothing shall destroy this work. *Not temptation*, for "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will

with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). *Not sin*, for "sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14). *Not Satan*, for the "God of all peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20). All this the Saviour comprehends in one single promise: "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

(2) Added to these are promises of actual grace and strength, and assurances that he will carry on and perfect the work. "As thy day so shall thy strength be" (Deut. 33:25). "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger" (Job 17:9). "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9). "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5). "Though the mountains depart and the hills be removed, my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed" (Isaiah 54:10). The Spirit of Truth, pointing to the grand inheritance beyond the grave, assures us that it is "reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:4-5). In view of all these assurances, we may boldly take our

stand with the Apostle upon the strength and covenant promise of God, and throw out our challenge to the world: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (Romans 8 : 33, 39.)

VI. *Finally, our text informs us of the time when this work will be completed.* "Will perform it until the *day of Jesus Christ*," that is, the day of his second coming, the day of his glorious appearing, when he shall come without sin unto salvation, to be admired in all his saints, but to the terror of all his enemies. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him" (Rev. 1 : 7). This day is called *his day*, because it will be the day of his glory and triumph, when he shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied, when all enemies shall be put under his feet, and every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Upon this day, the coronation-day of the King of Glory, when the trumpet shall sound, and all that are in their graves shall hear the call of the Son of Man and come forth, a voice, we are told, shall issue from the throne, saying, "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21 : 6). It is done. Redemption is done, salvation is finished; he who began the good work in you, the

Alpha of its incipency, is now the Omega of its completion. He hath performed it until the day of Jesus Christ.

The simple truth thus taught us is, salvation will be finished *then*—and this is the confidence of the Christian; and not till then—and this is the death of presumptuous perfectionism. But is not salvation complete at death? Nay, verily. The salvation of the soul is, for on that very day it shall be with Christ in Paradise; but not of the body, for it must repose in the grave till the Resurrection. At death, therefore, salvation is but half achieved. The soul is disenthralled, but the body, our dear mortal half, lies in the dust enduring the dishonors of the grave and the bondage of corruption. Until the day of Jesus Christ, therefore, we wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body, for it also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Then, when the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and our happy spirits reunited to bodies now glorified, salvation will be finished. The soul and the body rewedded in a holy, happy, and indissoluble union is salvation in its uttermost perfection.

In conclusion, the whole subject resolves itself into one single inquiry: Is this good work begun in you? Without it you are of no value. Salva-

tion is the tie that connects man with his Creator and binds him to his throne. If the tie does not exist, existence has no object. You float away a worthless atom in the universe, its proper attraction all gone, its destiny thwarted, and its whole future nothing but darkness, desolation, and death. But with this work begun in you, you are one of the precious sons of God, for whom this earth was reared and canopied with yon bright and burning blazonry. Without it you have missed the end of your creation, you are the cast-off lumber of creation, forever to be burned; but with it you are God's workmanship, and inheritors of an heirdom of glory. The efficiency is God's, the instrumentality is yours. It is yours to work, to "work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling"; it is God's to "work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."