

With Fear and Trembling

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Philippi:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ...



Therefore, my beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. (From Philippians 2, ESV)

What this passage does NOT mean is that you, as an individual Christian, have to struggle at being acceptable to God, and you should be afraid that you won't measure up; you will not be "good enough." That is not what it's about.

It's clear from the context that Paul is addressing this to the church as a group, as a congregation. Besides that, I'm told (since I don't know Greek) that the Greek words Paul used were all plural—not you as an individual, but [*you people*] as a church.

He's telling the group of Christians at Philippi to get along with each other, to work on their relationships, so that they together can present a positive witness to the world. The love of Christ among us has to be more than just words — it has to show in our actions, how we treat each other and behave toward other people. This is only part of our Christian witness to the world, but it is an important part.

He is also reminding them that we are not just saved from hell and destruction; we are saved for heaven and for ministry. There is work that we, the church, should be doing — “working out” our own salvation by helping, serving, and loving others, especially so that many others can also be saved. This is the ministry that God calls the church to do.

The “fear and trembling” part has to do with humility — understanding that God is God, infinitely and awesomely majestic and powerful, but also infinitely loving and understanding; we are not God, and we cannot accomplish any good thing unless we let Him be in charge and we obey as the Holy Spirit leads and guides and empowers us. We are not to be afraid of God. We should be afraid that we, His people, will let our human weakness get in the way and mess up what He is trying to do through us.

And yet, even though this passage is directed to a church, if we take this phrase, “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*,” completely out of its original context, I believe it summarizes God's will for you and me as individual followers of Christ.

There are two parts to “working out” our salvation.

1. Be the person God created you to be.

What kind of person? One who loves God for what He is — His holiness, His astonishing creativity, His goodness, His generosity, His love. Be a man or woman who loves others as genuinely as himself or herself. Be a person who trusts God and willingly obeys His commands; one who welcomes and follows the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

You are not that person today, and neither am I. But we are, or should be, in the process of becoming that person. Paul says, “*I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*” (Philippians 1:6) We “work out our salvation” by cooperating with the Spirit of God in this re-creation process.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

That's much easier to say than to do, of course. That's where the "work out" part comes in.

2. **Do the works God is calling you to do.**

It's important to remember that our salvation does not depend on our doing something to deserve it. As Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

God's grace is a wonderful gift. We don't deserve it and we can't earn it. We can choose to accept His gift, or we can refuse it.

Look at the second half of this little passage. "We are His workmanship." Who are the "we" here? Not everyone, but those who have been "created in Christ" — those who have been born again, who have accepted the gift of salvation. *...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

Created why? For good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God has prepared "good works" for us to do. What kind of good works? It varies, of course. His plan will be different for each believer. Some will preach or teach, others will be doctors, nurses, or care-givers. Some will sing in the choir; others will cook, or clean, or mind the nursery. The list could go on and on.

"Work out your own salvation," as applied to each individual, would mean we should watch for God-given opportunities to serve Him or others, using the talents and resources He has given us, and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit, and just do it.

Where does "fear and trembling" fit in this picture?

"Fear the LORD" does not mean "be afraid of God." It means be in awe of Him; properly respect who He is and how insignificant we'd be if He didn't love us.

But there is something to be afraid of — that we might let our human nature, which is selfish and rebellious and often very foolish, get in the way and mess up what God is trying to do through us.

What about "trembling"? Don't think of it as trembling in fear; rather, think of it as trembling with eagerness, with anticipation, like many race horses are at the starting gate.

David wrote, in Psalm 40, "I delight to do your will, O my God." Can we be delighted with doing the works God has prepared for us to do?

Yes, we can, and we should.

Sometimes the work may be difficult or painful, but if God is in the giving of the task, and the Holy Spirit is present in the doing of it, then the joy of being obedient and being used by God for good will offset whatever pain is involved. For an extreme example we are told to look at Jesus *... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame ... (Hebrews 12:2)*

Not that Jesus didn't dread the pain He knew was coming — we know He did dread it, and asked His Father for a "plan B" — but He stepped up and did it, and His joy is partly the knowledge that you and I and many others will be saved by His sacrifice.

God has prepared some works for us to do that are difficult or painful, and there are many others that can quickly give us joy or peace or delight. We need to remember that we don't do these things for our own pleasure; we do them because God wants them to be done. We have hope that one day God will say to us, *"Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master." (Matthew 25:21)*

We are now a month into the year 2020. All this month I have been pondering the phrase "20/20 vision." If you have 20/20 vision, it doesn't mean that your eyesight is "perfect" in any sense; it just means that you can see as well at a distance of 20 feet as the "average person" sees at that distance. But, in a sense, it also means that you can see clearly all that you need to see.

I pray that in this year of 2020 all of us who want to obey God, who want to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," will see clearly where He wants us to go, and what He wants us to do, and we will be given grace to say, with fear sometimes, but also with eagerness, "Yes, LORD. Here I am. Use me."

Be blessed. Praise the LORD always. Amen.

Brother Roland



The joy of the Lord – What is it?

Adapted from the website of Compelling Truth (www.compellingtruth.org)

The joy of the Lord is a supernatural confidence that God is sovereign, loving, powerful, and for us. It is the inner understanding, granted by the Holy Spirit, that no matter our circumstances, our condition, or our surroundings, God is working things out for our good (**Romans 8:28: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**)

The joy of the Lord is evident throughout the Bible, especially in regards to Jesus.

Before He was born, Mary sang of her joy (**Luke 1:47: ... my spirit rejoices in God my Savior**) and Jesus' cousin John, still in his mother's womb, leaped for joy (**Luke 1:44: For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy**). On the night of Jesus' birth, the angels brought "good news of great joy" to the shepherds, announcing the coming Savior (**Luke 2:10: And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.**)

Jesus Himself lived with joy. Once, He said He was like a bridegroom at his own wedding feast (**Mark 2:18-19: Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast."**)—that is unmatched joy! At one point, people accused Him of being too joyful (**Luke 7:34: The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'**). Jesus told His followers that He taught them for His own joy and for a full portion of joy for them (**John 15:11: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."** and **John 16:24: "Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."**).

Jesus' stories often resulted in joy—for example, the shepherd, woman, and father in Luke 15. Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit (**Luke 10:21: "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that**

you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.").

When the church began, it was known for its joy (**Acts 2:46–47: And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. And Acts 13:52: And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**). When Paul wrote about the fruit of the Spirit, he included joy (**Galatians 5:22: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ...**). And, there is more. See **Romans 14:17: For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.; Philipians 3:1: Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord; Philipians 4:4: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.; 1 Thessalonians 5:16: Rejoice always; and 1 Peter 1:8: Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,**

This joy of the Lord permeates the Bible. It extends deeper and further than mere happiness, which is temporary. It is constant (**John 10:28–29: I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.**).

Joy is a cornerstone of our relationship with God and that's why He spends so much time telling us about it in the Bible. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

Our entire relationship with God, made through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, is set on a foundation of joy. (**Hebrews 12:2 - "Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"**).

Psalm 1 — His Delight Is in the LORD

Psalm 1 is a favorite psalm of many Christians, because it tells about being blessed simply by being the person God intends for each of us to be. Read and enjoy this psalm, and enjoy the puzzle.

Puzzle:

E X A 1 Y T H G I N D N A Y A D R O V T F P Q V B B S V G V O H E
K V E S S L V G B P A W K H R D R O C R R X O Y F U S W U I B K M
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F I O Z S E L M U Q S A W A T C H E S O V E R L O H P T A L S I S
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U V R L Q O O W O P S D O C P R I E A B S H O C E C C W O O W R T
W R E B E F H H V M H A Q J S R N L D A G T D E J N Q X F I P A V
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R N S Z U N G Y W E Z B R N A N H S O F S K D H H O L C L W K C J
A E T L S E X I V D T O I L I T I Q U M E E I Y H E C K O L N I S
T Y T H H R S E Z I N S P H F K F B K O K B P H X L M O R F Q W W
H U V A E S A L B T I A J O N L N L T C E H C Q R V Q A D O K E S
G B N C W C L D P A B U M T I D A I I S U T Z V Z I W B N H J H O
I G T S X F O S T T A B B I H W O W O I T K H Z U H V A W W P T E
L A L D O S O U P E N Z P L T E E E G E J W Y G A D R X O T H F Q
E Q N P E P L S N S B Z Q O E H Y D S H H V S T I I N S E A S O N
D W T M H K P R M S G W N S T S X A V N T R E K O R B T H L F U Q
S Z V H Q R C Y L A E S G F F H S K R A O V Y R F A E N I W B G C
I P L W A O L I T Z E L O X V O F E E E E T A N D O N H I S L A W
H J F I P T K C W O M R A O B R R J D R R J W N T X Y L T J R N U
T U D R K E T S D E M U T G O D Z T H K P C E I Y I L A I Z D O D
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B C R H H I A A E I N T H E J U D G M E N T T R E H Z R E E F Q E
J Z A W I N M T V W T T S Y M O F P C D L K N R T S E H F A H L I
X F F U J U F Z R N I N T A E S E H T N I O I W A Y X R Z S P T V
F L X Z R F K S F E E N P S O C G V I B I S R Q P S G S U Z T F H
K M F L N D Y B U D E G D R G J Z F T T H C T D J B A K T D W I J

Words:

PSALMS 1
BLESSED
IS THE MAN WHO
DOES NOT WALK
IN THE COUNSEL
OF THE WICKED
OR STAND
IN THE WAY
OF SINNERS
OR SIT
IN THE SEAT
OF MOCKERS.
BUT HIS DELIGHT

IS IN THE LAW
OF THE LORD,
AND ON HIS LAW
HE MEDITATES
DAY AND NIGHT.
HE IS
LIKE A TREE
PLANTED BY
STREAMS OF WATER,
WHICH YIELDS
ITS FRUIT
IN SEASON
AND WHOSE LEAF

DOES NOT WITHER.
WHATEVER HE DOES
PROSPERS.
NOT SO
THE WICKED!
THEY ARE
LIKE CHAFF
THAT THE WIND
BLOWS AWAY.
THEREFORE
THE WICKED
WILL NOT STAND
IN THE JUDGMENT,

NOR SINNERS
IN THE ASSEMBLY
OF THE RIGHTEOUS.
FOR THE LORD
WATCHES OVER
THE WAY OF
THE RIGHTEOUS,
BUT THE WAY
OF THE WICKED
WILL PERISH.