



# INTERNAL SALVATION

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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”*  
Phil. 1:6.

These words set forth a fundamental aspect of salvation that is now widely ignored, and it is one of the vital points at which the pulpit needs testing, for if it be faulty here, then its trumpet gives forth an uncertain sound. Alas, most of the pulpits today are engaged in declaring what man must do: creature performances are the sum and substance of the great majority of modern sermons, the operations of God being relegated to the rear. True, there are those who have quite a little to say of what God has done for sinners, yet most of these men are radically defective in their conceptions of what has to be wrought in sinners before there can be any salvation for them. These men talk much about the “finished work of Christ,” and many are misled by them, for they are largely, if not wholly, silent upon the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

How few there are today who perceive that the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit is as indispensable as is the sacrificial work of Christ. That is why we often hear untaught evangelists say, and read in the “tracts” of our day, “salvation is by the blood of Christ alone,” or “we are saved by faith alone”: statements which are unscriptural, most misleading, and highly dangerous because of their lopsidedness. A man may hold the most Scriptural views of the Atonement, and though that may evidence his “orthodoxy,” yet it is no proof at all that he is a new creature in Christ. He may highly honour faith and vehemently affirm that good works have no part or place in the saving of the soul, and yet be alienated from God. Unless the Holy Spirit has “begun a good work in me” then I am still dead in sins!

“He which hath begun a good work in you.” Ah, that is what draws the line of demarcation between the living and the dead: that is what distinguishes true professors from empty professors. And why? Because that “good work” is not in any of us by nature. That statement calls for a word of explanation and amplification. There

still remains in fallen man the remnants of that “likeness” or “similitude of God” in which he was originally created, as is clear from James 3:9. The Apostle Paul hesitated not to declare that even the heathen “show the work of the Law written in their heart” (Rom. 2:15). The most depraved and wicked possess a conscience, which is “the candle of the Lord” (Prov. 20:27) within them. Nevertheless, the unregenerate are utterly devoid of even a “spark” of Divine life in them, and therefore is it said of them, “There is none that doeth good, no not one” (Rom. 3:12).

For our first main division we will consider the nature or character of this “good work” of which the Holy Spirit is the Agent. Under this head our text suggests four lines of thought. First, it is a Divine work: “He which hath begun a good work in you.” The Author of it is God, and not man. The creature contributes nothing whatever to it. The favoured subject thereof is entirely passive in it: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). This “good work” is a creative act on the part of God, and to talk of the creature “cooperating” with the Creator in connection with creation, is the language of imbecility. I was no more consulted about and had no more to do with my spiritual birth than I had with my natural. Nor does the preacher have any more hand in the resurrection of the soul (which is what this good work is) than he will have in the resurrection of the body. God, and God alone, is the Author of it.

Second, it is as yet an incomplete work: “He which hath begun a good work in you.” This Divine miracle of grace is carried forward from stage to stage: “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear” (Mark 4:28). It is commenced at regeneration, it is continued by sanctification, it is consummated at glorification. It is highly important that the Christian should clearly grasp this fact: God has not finished with him yet. We are impatient creatures, and wish to fly before our wings are grown. Many of our expectations are as unwarrantable as they are unattainable. It is but the initial work that God has wrought in the believer, and it remains uncompleted throughout this life. Then let us not look for that in us or from us which will be realized only in Heaven. Sinless perfection in this world is a madman’s delusion.

Third, it is an internal work: “He which hath begun a good work in you.” This is the vital, necessary, indispensable sequel to what Christ did for them. The atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus avails them not until they exercise faith in it, and that is impossible so long as a person be dead in trespasses and sins. He must be born again before he can savingly believe and obtain forgiveness from God. The “good work,” then, is wrought in the heart. It is no mere making clean the outside of the platter, while the inside be left all foul and filthy. A radical change is effected by the supernatural operations of God. A principle of spiritual life, a new nature is imparted, an “incorruptible seed” is placed within the soul, which radically affects all its faculties — the understanding, conscience, affections, and will.

Fourth, it is a sovereign work: “He which hath begun a good work in you” — it is not performed in all the members of Adam’s race. And why? Because God disburses His charity and distributes His gifts according to the good pleasure of His own will. This “good work” is wrought in none but “God’s elect.” Nor is it wrought in them because they are any better or worthier than the non-elect, for they are not so. There was nothing whatever in them to induce God to perform a miracle of grace in their hearts. It was not because they desired or prayed for it, for “there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11). If it be asked why God favours them rather than others, the only answer forthcoming is, “Even so Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matt. 11:26).

For our second main division we will consider the evidences of this “good work.” The great question which exercises every quickened soul is, Has this “good work” begun in me? This is a matter which causes him the deepest possible concern, far more so than anything connected with his temporal interests. All other considerations fade into utter insignificance before this momentous inquiry: Has a miracle of grace been wrought in my soul? Is it possible for me to be sure? Many answer, No, declaring that this is a profound mystery which it is impossible for any man to elucidate, insisting that assurance is but proud presumption. But God’s Word declares, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16): against that Divine

declaration all human objections are worthless.

Again, we read in the Word of Truth, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:13): therefore assurance is both possible and desirable. In view of these passages it is clear that we may ascertain whether or not this good work has been wrought in us. But how? By its effects. Recall for a moment the nature of this “good work.” It is Divine: therefore it must be far above anything the creature can produce. Yet it is incomplete: therefore we must not look for something already completed. It is internal: therefore it is within we must look if we are to identify it. This good work is wrought by the Holy Spirit in the heart: it is something which He imparts and produces there, and it is discoverable by the effects which the change makes there.

In developing this point we will endeavour to be very plain and simple. First, a harrowed heart is an inevitable effect of the Spirit’s good work. By nature the heart of fallen man is as hard as sun-baked ground after a long drought. Its possessor is quite unconcerned about his eternal destiny, utterly indifferent whether God’s smile or God’s frown be upon him: thoroughly in love with sin, he is a total stranger to any grief occasioned by having displeased and dishonoured the Most High. But when a work of Divine grace is begun in him, all this is changed. It is like plentiful showers of rain falling upon and moistening the earth. His heart is softened and chastened. In consequence, he is deeply exercised as to his eternal destiny, greatly troubled over his past carelessness and wickedness, fearful that he has so sinned away his day of grace that he is beyond the reach of mercy. His heart is sore wounded at the realization he has offended so grievously against God.

Second, an honest heart is a sure proof that this good work has begun in him. “That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it” (Luke 8:15) — this is what distinguishes them from the barren-ground believers. But note well the order: the heart must be made “honest” before it can rightly be designated “good.” An honest heart is indeed a rare and wonderful thing. By nature our hearts are thoroughly deceitful and hypocritical: that is why we love to be

flattered and fish for compliments; that is why when the preacher is conscious of having failed, he is most anxious to be told his sermon was an excellent one; that is why we are pleased when the photographer conceals our defects. Now that streak of deceitfulness is not removed at regeneration, but a principle of honesty is imparted.

Ah, that is the very thing I am exercised about, for who knows better than myself how two-faced I am! If I am to be weighed against the balance of genuine honesty, I am certain to be “found wanting.” Not so fast, dear friend. Let me point out how you may discover whether this principle of honesty be in you. If it is, then you are greatly afraid of being deceived in soul matters, and you earnestly beg God to search you and show you your actual state. One with an honest heart desires to know the worst about himself! Measure yourself by that criterion: no unregenerate person can survive it, for he is determined to think well of himself, no matter what evidence there be to the contrary. One with an honest heart cries to the Lord, “If I am mistaken in supposing I am born again, reveal it to me; if I am deluded by Satan, open mine eyes before it be too late.” No one who lacks an honest heart will ever sincerely pray thus!

Third, a holy heart evidences God’s work in us. Ah, you say, that cuts me off entirely, for my heart is most unholy. Nothing you can say to the contrary can alter the fact: I am a spiritual leper, a mass of corruption, polluted at the very core of my being; and to say that such a vile creature as I am possesses a holy heart is both a mockery and a lie. Listen: the graces of the Spirit in our hearts are like lovely flowers growing amid rank and stinking weeds. This is the grand miracle of Divine grace, that purity is planted amid impurity; a Christ-like principle is placed in soil that is earthly, sensual, and devilish. Nor does that holy principle eradicate or reduce the sin which surrounds it; nay, the one in whom it dwells frequently has occasion to cry “iniquities prevail against me” (Psa. 65:3). But neither the presence nor the power of indwelling sin is any disproof of a principle of holiness in the heart.

That principle is evidenced by loathing the filth that surrounds it, and grieving because of inability to exterminate it. Again, that

principle of holiness in the soul may be distinguished thus: a holy God is delighted in. You dare not say you delight in God? But do you not admire and adore His character? Do you not perceive and own His attributes are perfect? Do you not crave after and seek unto communion with Him? The unregenerate do not! That is the last thing they want! Are not your most joyous moments those which are spent in fellowship with God — a brief foretaste of Heaven? Do you not long to be conformed to His image? These are some of the certain marks of a principle of holiness in the heart, none of which are the products of mere nature, nor can they be attributed unto any refinings of the flesh. A work of grace must be wrought before the heart desires, seeks after, delights in God.

Fourth, a humble heart is another sure evidence of the “good work” having been performed in it. Necessarily so, for nothing is more characteristic of fallen man than self-complacency and self-satisfaction. If, then, a person genuinely loathes himself, if he frankly acknowledges his very righteousnesses are as filthy rags, then a miracle of grace must have been wrought within him. Yes, says the dubious reader, I freely endorse the truth of that, yet I certainly dare not lay claim to possessing an humble heart. How can I when fully conscious of the fact that I am so often filled with pride? Why, I am such a conceited creature that I take credit for the faithful discharge of duties, and pat myself on the back when I have had liberty at prayer. Even if I be chastened for a season, I congratulate myself on my growing humility. No, my heart is very far from being a lowly one.

Let it be pointed out, then, that the presence of spiritual humility does not destroy or even refine natural pride. No, not in that direction must we look for proofs of its existence. Where, then? Here: if regenerated you dare not, you cannot, you could not make yourself get alone with God and boast before Him. Yet the Pharisee does (Luke 18:11)! Then you are not a Pharisee, dear friend. When before God, you disown all worthiness of your own, and cast yourself upon His bare grace. Do you? Yes; then that proves there is a principle of true humility in your heart. Are you not thoroughly convinced that if ever you be justified it must be by and because of the righteousness of Christ, and that alone? But no self-righteous

person will allow that. Are you not deeply distressed over the workings of pride in your heart? You would not be so if there were no spiritual principle of humility in you. No unregenerate person ever grieves over the swellings of self-complacency.

“There is in some weaker Christians, I do not know well what name to call it by, it is an over modesty, a thinking and speaking over meanly of themselves; and which they affect to do, and carry things to too great a length very much this way, as if they had no faith, nor love, and scarce any hope; and are ready to express themselves in such sort as seems to border, at least, upon a denial of the work of grace upon their souls; and is like a tearing up by the roots, as much as in them lies, the very principles of grace in them; which should never be encouraged, but discountenanced; the least measure of grace should be owned, and men should be thankful for it, and pray for an increase of it” (John Gill). It is because of this we have spoken so plainly and frankly above, trusting that it may please God to bless the same unto the establishing of some of His trembling little ones.

Now, dear reader, we have sought to show that the “good work” which the Spirit has begun in those whom He has brought from death unto life may be discovered by the effects which it produces upon its favoured subjects. Those effects we have summed up in a harrowed, honest, holy, and humble heart. These are the sure indexes, the marks, the infallible criteria by which we may identify the Spirit’s miracle of grace. Such lovely graces are not the native product of earth’s human soil; no, they come down from above and are planted in the soul at regeneration.

We have not left ourselves much space for the third main division, to consider the completion of this good work: “He which hath begun a good work in you will finish it until the day of Jesus Christ.” One of the things which occasion most concern unto those who have a little assurance is that the work of Divine grace within them is making such small progress, nay, it often seems, none at all; that there is no growth in grace, no fruitfulness. To those who mourn over this, the above is indeed a precious promise. First, it is an absolute and unconditional one; there are no provisos or stipulations attached to it. The good work proceeds as it began —



altogether apart from creature worthiness or creature efforts. And, we may add, its continuation, like its beginning, is perceivably only by the effects which are produced.

Second, it is a promise made good by pure grace — notwithstanding innumerable failures and sins. In himself, the believer is just as unworthy at the close of his pilgrimage as he was when the good work was begun in him. It is all of grace from first to last. Third, this promise is one which issues from the eternal and immutable love of God, which is solemnly pledged in the Everlasting Covenant and guaranteed by the infinitely meritorious work of Christ. Fourth, this promise is secured by Divine omnipotence; despite indwelling sin, a hostile world, an opposing Devil, “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.” O what thanks and praise are due unto Him who enables the believer to say, “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy, O LORD, endureth forever” (Psa. 138:8).

