

Introduction: Savor the slow pace of many Scripture texts. God is not in a hurry, and He wants us to linger on towering verses like Philippians 1:6 until our hearts sing with the reassurance such verses give us. God has truly begun a good work in us which He intends to carry through to completion!

MONDAY/TUESDAY: Read Philippians 1:1-6 and 2:1-11. We cannot go wrong in citing Philippians 2:1-11 as the great engine of the life of faith. All effort in “working out our salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12), comes from the finished work of the cross, which has earned Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of the Father, from whence He pours out His Spirit onto our lives. By that Spirit, we are able to work by faith and do the good works which the Lord Jesus has ordained for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

But the Father was not idly standing by while His Son expended such effort to reclaim us from sin. Yes, to be sure, much of the Gospel is about how Christ became our Savior and how Christ followed the perfect plan of salvation to redeem, justify and sanctify us.

But, beyond our questions about *how* to live the Christian life, we must go back to look at the initiative the Father took to begin this work to save us. Do we ever look back in this way: as a rower glides *forward* with his eyes cast *back* on where he has just sculled? In just this way, we must look back to God’s grace, when He “began His good work in us” (Philippians 1:6), and then pray fervently for the future with our faith fixed firmly on the good work God has begun. Our words should be something like these:

“Remember your will and plan, Father, from the first – before our justification; before our conversion; before our baptism; before we sought you, met you or knew you. Remember how it was *your eternal* desire alone which took the initiative to spare us at all.”

(And then we should confess in prayer),

Though you began this good work in us (Philippians 1:6) many of us have wandered into rebellious lives of our own making, acting as if *our* activity and goals are pre-eminent. In our pride, we often think that it is up to us to chart our own course.

Lord, we would go further. Many who used to confess faith appear to be on a course contrary to the Word of God. Against all such proud independence from the Lord, and against all such spiritual departure from a heart in which God is the love of our lives – hear our urgent prayers:

Remember your highest and best for us! Do not let us settle for a loose or merely formal religious bond with you! Rekindle the fire which now smolders and light anew our candle of faith, though right now, the wick gives little light.

Most of all, Lord, hear us as we apply this prayer to the next generation who can often wander far from you and your ways ... remember the pleasure you had when our children took their first spiritual steps. Remember the vows which we took at their baptism; remember the catechism questions which we and they seriously took to heart; remember the elderly saints who took such a spiritual interest in them at such a tender age. Remember the prayers offered up for them even before their births!

Meditate and Pray: This, then, is the posture of a praying, thankful life by which we embrace the promise of Philippians 1:6. We are simply asking God to take His work up again, “fulfilling His purpose for us and not forsaking the work of His hands” (Psalm 138:8).

WEDNESDAY: Read Philippians 1:1-6 and Philippians 2:5-11. It is because the Son of God interpreted His own role as God's Son to be one of "purchasing the church with His own blood," – that God the Father exalted His Son above "every name that can be named." In such costly obedience, the Son did not lose any of what it meant to be essentially and eternally God. But in adding the lowly position of a suffering servant, in the "likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3) Christ showed that part of what it means to be God is to have a sacrificial willingness to stoop and save lost sinners. Such mercy towards sinners points to the crowning attribute of God's grace.

So it is no surprise that, *as Paul magnified the sacrificial love of God the Son in Philippians 2:5-11, so he draws our attention to God the Father's sovereign grace as the root cause of the "good work" of salvation which God the Father began in Philippians 1:6.*

In other words, just as we magnify God the Son as the One who took up a real human body to save us; just as we magnify the Holy Spirit as the One who works in us to make us new creatures, so we are to magnify the decree of God the Father which ordained this plan of salvation in the first place. It is God the Father who "begins that good work" of saving sinners in Philippians 1! As Dr. Sinclair Ferguson points out, we will discover *how* God does this work of saving and sanctifying us later in Philippians. But we must begin with the simple and awesome fact that it is the Father who begins this good work and who will also finish what He started.

Meditate and Pray: Don't you love hymn # 463 in our Red Trinity Hymnals that speaks of God as both the "starter" and "finisher" of His good work of salvation?

1 A debtor to mercy alone,
of covenant mercy I sing;
nor fear, with thy righteousness on,
my person and off'ring to bring.
The terrors of law and of God
with me can have nothing to do;
my Savior's obedience and blood
hide all my transgressions from view.

2 **The work which his goodness began,
the arm of his strength will complete;**
his promise is yea and amen,
and never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
nor all things below or above,
can make him his purpose forgo,
or sever my soul from his love.

3 My name from the palms of his hands
eternity will not erase;
impressed on his heart it remains,
in marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
as sure as the earnest is giv'n;
more happy, but not more secure,
the glorified spirits in heav'n.

THURSDAY/FRIDAY: Read Ephesians 2:1-5 and Philippians 1:6. We celebrate God's power to "begin the good work" of our salvation by adhering in our Reformed Churches, to the doctrine of "Sola Gratia". Let's close this week's Bible notes by defining this pillar of our Reformed faith.

What we mean by "Sola Gratia" is that there is no one who cooperates with God when He sets out to redeem a sinner. Man is passive and unable to take one step to God until God begins the good work of salvation. The

reason for this is laid forth in Ephesians 2:1-5, which we quote below, with certain words highlighted to clearly emphasize what Paul is saying:

And you were **dead in the trespasses and sins** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace** you have been saved— ...

Here are some key lessons to grasp from these verses:

- 1) The reason no man can actively originate spiritual life is because all men in Adam are “dead.” Just as Lazarus was dead until the voice of Christ reanimated him, so when God begins the good work of saving us (Phil 1:6) we must be quickened by the Spirit *before we can repent, believe and be converted*. So it is God’s grace alone which saves us, since we are dead in sin and trespasses and unable to respond at all.
- 2) When we speak of God’s grace “alone” as saving, we are describing a work of God’s almighty power. This is why, in Ephesians 2:5 above, Paul can speak in the same breath of God’s “making us alive together with Christ” and saving us “by grace.” Only the almighty power that raised Christ from the dead is strong enough to awaken us, since we are dead under the condemnation of God’s law and at enmity with God until this grace begins to work.
- 3) Since it is “grace alone” which saves, there is no boasting on our part, but rather, giving of all glory to God alone for His taking the initiative to save us. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes this clear: “By grace you are saved ... not as a result of works, so that no one can boast.”

Meditate and Pray: Sing this great hymn about God’s grace and power alone as able to quicken us in the dungeon of our blindness and sin. See # 455 in your red *Trinity Hymnal*, verse 4:

1 And can it be that I should gain
an int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

3 He left his Father's throne above
(so free, so infinite his grace!),
humbled himself (so great his love!)
and bled for all his chosen race!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me! **[Refrain]**

5 No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,

Refrain: Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
[Refrain]

bold I approach th'eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my
own. **[Refrain]**

SATURDAY/SUNDAY: Read Philippians 1:6 and Ephesians 2:4-10. As we glorify God for beginning this good work in us by grace alone and finishing it on the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6), we must also remember that it is through the instrument of faith that this salvation results in our conversion. The saving union we have with our Savior, so that every part of our Christian life is now lived “in Christ” is a union only achieved as the Holy Spirit’s working faith in us. This is why Ephesians 2 goes on to speak of faith in verses 8-9:

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.

But notice how faith is placed by Paul on the side of unmerited grace, and not on the side of human works or merit.

To paraphrase an old Puritan, in words that demonstrate that our conversion and faith contribute nothing in terms of merit to our salvation -

“Faith does not receive its merit or value by works ... As Romans 11:6 says, “If by grace, then it is no more of work; otherwise grace is no more grace.” ...

Faith does not justify as it is an act of grace in us, but only instrumentally; not as it works by love, but as it apprehends Christ; not as if the act of believing were instead of perfect obedience to the law, but only as it lays hold of Jesus Christ ... (Yes) faith is said to justify, but only because it is alone the means God has ordained to apprehend Christ. As the hand is said to feed the body, but the nutritional value is not in the hand but in the food the hand picks up, so faith is simply an open hand that receives Christ and feeds on Him. (Thomas Manton)

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the grace of faith in laying hold of Christ, using hymn # 468 in the *Red Trinity Hymnal*:

1 My faith has found a resting place,
from guilt my soul is freed;
I trust the ever-living One,
his wounds for me shall plead.

2 Enough for me that Jesus saves,
this ends my fear and doubt;
a sinful soul I come to him,
he’ll never cast me out. [Refrain]

4 My great Physician heals the sick,
the lost he came to save;
for me his precious blood he shed,
for me his life he gave. [Refrain]

Refrain: I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
it is enough that Jesus died,
and that he died for me.

3 My heart is leaning on the Word,
the written Word of God:
salvation by my Savior’s name,
salvation thro’ his blood. [Refrain]