

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING

Stephen H. Geiger

Philippians 2 is well known for its description of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. As the first part of chapter two makes evident, this description is not offered by Paul simply to give his readers a better sense of how they were saved. Paul is making an appeal for sanctified Christian living. He presents the humiliation and exaltation of Christ as an example of looking first not to one's own interests but instead to the interests of others. Surely there is no better example of this than Christ giving up his life for the world.

After describing the glorious conclusion to Jesus' humble service, Paul offers a "therefore." The words that follow the "therefore" challenge us on a number of different levels. They challenge us to action. But they also challenge us in their content. Doesn't the phrasing "work out your own salvation" inevitably lead to a work-righteous view of gaining eternal life? In what sense should sanctified living be produced "with fear and trembling" rather than from a heart filled with joy?

Consider Philippians 2:12-13.

¹² Ὡστε, ἀγαπητοί μου, καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπήκουσατε, μὴ ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου, μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε. ¹³ θεὸς γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας. (NA27)

¹²Therefore, 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, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (NIV)

Work Out Your Own Salvation

When we hear the words "work out your own salvation," we instinctively feel the need to offer clarification, or perhaps to qualify the terminology. In the interest of properly avoiding any implication that salvation is by works, we might long to translate κατεργάζεσθε "put to work" rather than "work out" or "produce" or "bring about." If "put to work" was a valid option, we could understand the verse to be

saying, “You possess salvation. Put that gift to work. Reflect to others the love Christ has shown to you.”

Such an understanding is surely scriptural. The question is whether the vocable *κατεργάζομαι* permits such an understanding here.

There are a number of occasions where *κατεργάζομαι* does not mean “work out” (a definition essentially equivalent to “bring about” or “produce”).¹ In Judges 16:16, Delilah’s nagging of Samson is described. The NIV reads, “With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was tired to death.” In the Septuagint, *κατεργάζομαι* is used as the equivalent for “prodded,” which represents the Hebrew word *רָצַץ*, meaning “to press upon” or “constrain.” The Septuagint is in essence saying, “She worked him (with words).”

In this case there is an object (“him”), and one wouldn’t translate *κατεργάζομαι* as “work out” or “produce” or “bring about.” Delilah didn’t *work out* or *produce* Samson. At the same time, though, one could not properly say that Delilah “put Samson to work.” She worked him over. She did something to him that had a transformative effect on him.² To carry that definition into our Philippians context, Paul would be saying, “We do something to salvation that changes salvation.” That would not make sense.

What meaning does fit the context? The vast majority of times *κατεργάζομαι* is used with a direct object, the direct object is the consequence of the working. In Romans 4:15, the Law works, or brings about, wrath. In 2 Corinthians 9:11, generosity works or produces or brings about thanksgiving.³

¹The definition “work out” might initially seem to permit an understanding different than “bring about” or “produce,” but it does mean essentially the same thing. For example, when one *works out* an agreement with an opposing party, one is “bringing about” or “producing” an agreement. BDAG lists “work out” as a sub-definition for *κατεργάζομαι* under the larger category “to cause a state or condition, *bring about, produce, create.*” As a classical parallel for the definition “work out,” BDAG cites Plato’s *Gorgias* 473d, where Socrates is referring back to one who makes himself a despot through criminal means: “ὁ κατειρχασμένος τὴν τυραννίδα ἀδίκως.” In the Loeb Classical edition, this is translated, “He who has unjustly compassed the despotic power.” The term “compassed” is defined as “bring about, achieve; to get into one’s possession or power” (Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition). BDAG, then, is equating the phrase “work out” with “bring about” or “produce.”

²Another example of *κατεργάζομαι* being used to denote an action that transforms its object in some way is 2 Corinthians 5:5—the one who worked/prepared/fashioned us for this is God (ὁ δὲ κατεργασάμενος ἡμᾶς εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο θεός).

³There is another common use of *κατεργάζομαι* with a direct object, one similar to this “produce/bring about” understanding but not exactly equivalent. In this use, the direct object is the thing *done*. For example, 1 Corinthians 5:3 “The one who did this (bad thing);” 2 Corinthians 12:12 “The signs of an apostle that were *done* among you” . . . in a sense, this is similar to “produce/bring about,” though the idea of “consequence” is not as strong.

So, the easiest way to translate *κατεργάζομαι* in Philippians 2:12 is to say that we are to work out or produce or bring about our salvation. It is our challenge, then, to determine in what respect this can be said without contradicting a verse like Romans 3:28 (“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law”) or Romans 4:5 (“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness”).

The ὅστε that begins verse 12 indicates that the imperative of verse 12 is built upon, in some fashion, what precedes. The previous section, as it highlights the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, is an encouragement to have a humble and servant-like attitude that mimics the one demonstrated by Christ. Having described in verses 5-11 precisely how Christ demonstrated the ultimate in humility and service, Paul then says, “Therefore.” He follows the “therefore” with a reminder of past obedience. While the term “obedience” can refer to believing (Acts 6:7; cf. 1 John 3:23), given the previous context of chapter 2 it is most natural to see obedience here as resultant attitudes and actions of love that conform to God’s revealed will for Christian living, those fruits of Spirit-given and strengthened faith.

As “work out your salvation” is presented as a future behavior that is to match the past behavior of energetic sanctified living—living that is characterized by humility and service—one must understand “work out your salvation” as referring to one’s ongoing practice of Christian sanctification.

What, though, can that mean? In what respect can it be said that our sanctification is bringing about or producing our salvation?

2 Peter 1:3-9 includes many elements which are similar to Philippians 2:12-13 and its context. 2 Peter 1:3 notes that divine power has given us everything that we need for life and godliness (“God working in us” of Philippians 2:13). It presents a context of salvation completely by grace, noting “great and precious promises” (“righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” of Philippians 3:9). And, as is the case in Philippians, a strong encouragement to sanctified living is offered. Peter, rather than saying, “Bring about your salvation,” says, “Make every effort to add to your faith goodness” etc., “. . . for if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:5,8). Then he adds, “But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins” (1:9). Peter concludes, “If you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:11).

Is Peter saying that our earthly actions earn us eternal life? Not at all. What he is saying is that sanctification is the natural and inevitable result of faith in Jesus. If there is no fruit, it is proper to conclude that such a person has forgotten the unconditional gospel. To have forgotten the gospel is to be damned. On the other hand, when the gospel is remembered and treasured, one naturally produces fruits. When this proper understanding of faith is in place—a faith that remembers forgiveness, which inevitably produces works—one does not fall.⁴ Peter, as he chooses to highlight the natural outgrowth of faith, equates the one who is a fruit-producing creation to one who never falls and enters heaven. Peter is saying nothing other than that authentic Christians receive eternal life.⁵

Could one say that Peter is encouraging believers to make their salvation happen? He is surely not saying that they can earn their salvation. But as he speaks about the joyful task the New Man loves, the task of working hard to honor the Lord, he does say that “in this way”—as they are operating as an authentic Christian naturally will—heaven will be given to them. Heaven is not given to inauthentic “Christians.” Heaven is not given to those who claim a faith that does not naturally possess works (James 2). Make heaven happen, Peter says, as you revel in the true definition of Spirit-given faith. Make heaven happen as you joyfully and energetically witness God producing fruit through your faith. Make heaven happen as you come to witness how the Lord has given you everything for life and godliness, including the very thoughts and actions that constitute godly living.

Making heaven happen has nothing to do with imagining that heaven is anything other than a gift. Making heaven happen, in 2 Peter 1, is all about reveling in a component of the definition of authentic faith, that is, the natural consequence of faith, our eagerness to live a godly life.

⁴By connecting “not falling” to the possession of authentic faith and the inevitable fruits of that faith, Peter is in no way suggesting that in some way the human has the power to keep himself from falling, nor is he marginalizing God’s election of us (1 Thessalonians 1:4) or his promise to preserve us in the faith (Philippians 1:6). Finally, our faith and its fruits are themselves works of God. But more to the point, Peter is simply highlighting the concurrence of, on the one hand, authentic faith and inevitable works, and, on the other hand, not falling. As will be noted later, the New Man rejoices in having authentic Christianity defined because this definition serves as an antidote to the lie of the flesh, which suggests that tolerance of sin is not problematic to the status of a Christian. While highlighting concurrence, Peter in no way is denying ultimate causality; the ultimate and only cause of our remaining in faith and not falling is the powerful grace of God (Ephesians 1:4-6).

⁵One defines “authentic Christianity,” then, as humble confidence that salvation is completely by grace without works (Ro 3:28), confidence (faith) which can’t help but offer the response of joyful thanksgiving for such a free salvation.

In Philippians 2, Paul is saying nothing different. Make salvation happen, he says. Bring it about. Produce it. But his use of these terms in no way is intended to take a Christian's eyes off of Christ. Quite the opposite. He intends, as did Peter, to offer encouragement that is a joy for the New Man to hear—"do good works!"—but not as an implication that such works are the cause of one's eternal life. Being cleansed from past sins fulfills that role (Philippians 3:9; 2 Peter 1:9). Rather, he is noting that an inevitable component in the life of one headed for eternal salvation is works. To deny that is to deny what God says about authentic faith, and to deny that is to deny salvation. To rejoice in that is to confess complete and total confidence that Christ and his forgiveness are the only reason I'll be in heaven. My faith in that gift can't help but humbly serve. To embrace such a definition of faith and to embrace my role of humble service is, in Paul's words, to "make salvation happen" and in Peter's words, "as you do these things, you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

But why say it this way? Why say "work out" or "bring about" or "produce" your own salvation? Why use phraseology which could, when ripped out of context, give an impression that "by grace alone" is overstatement?

Note to whom Paul is talking. He is talking to Christians who have a beautiful track record of fruit-producing faith. He is speaking to Christians in whom the Spirit is daily working. He is preaching to the choir. He's telling them, and he's telling us, exactly what our New Man wants to hear. Tell me, says the New Man, that living with thoughts and words and actions that please God is the definition of who I am. Reaffirm for me what I myself confess, that when a man remains in Jesus, he produces much fruit. Tell me that this is part of the definition of true freedom, because I've been set free from my sin through Christ and heaven is my home and I want to live as a free man.

Tell me, says the New Man, because it gives me joy to have the truth spoken in a setting where this wicked liar, my flesh, keeps spouting deceptions. He tries to suggest that there is such a thing as faith without works. He whispers that there is little danger in falling into sin. He says that grace is a reason to disobey more. These are lies. I know that this is not the way one brings about salvation—through a lie. Tell me the truth. Remind me that salvation happens as one refuses to change God's definition of a Christian: I am saved by faith alone; I joyfully confess that such faith is never alone.

Salvation comes in connection with that truth. Therefore, one can say that spiritual life which embraces that truth "brings about" or "produces" salvation. This in no way implies any human addition to

God's grace; rather, it simply gives definition to authentic Christianity, appeals to Christians to continue in authentic Christianity, and notes that authentic Christianity "brings about" or "produces" salvation.

With Fear and Trembling

But there's more to be said. Paul here isn't narrowly focusing on a proper understanding of works in the life of a Christian. Yes, he is encouraging sanctified living. But the real point of Philippians 2:12-13 goes beyond that. Structurally, the words of emphasis in verse 12 are not the imperative "work out" but the phrase "with fear and trembling."⁶

Our New Man, rejoicing to do the will of God, is to engage in energetic efforts of humble obedience *with fear and trembling*.

While it is true that the New Man's joy in hearing encouragement for sanctification always exists in a context of ongoing spiritual struggle, where the Old Adam is present and the New Man daily desires to put him down, here the context does not suggest such a "first use of the law"⁷ relationship. The authorial purpose in Philippians 2:12-13 is not parallel to Romans 7:14-24, where an appropriate conclusion is to be, "What a wretched man I am," leading then to exultant relief found in Christ as Savior. Instead, here Paul is speaking of Christians insofar as they are Christian and is offering positive encouragement to continue in the path of godly living, a path to which they are already committed. He is speaking to them according to their New Man ("as you have always obeyed"). His primary anticipated conclusion is not "I have sinned" but rather "Thank you for affirming the longings of my thankful heart. This is exactly what I want to do!"

How then does the concept of fear and trembling fit in such a context of positive affirmation?

There are other places where sanctification is encouraged in a context of fear. The writer to the Hebrews, after having reminded his readers of the grace-filled heavenly Jerusalem as well as the oncoming judgment, says, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably *with reverence and awe* (μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους); and in fact⁸ our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Hebrews 12:28-29).⁹ Peter, after having encouraged his fellow Christians to be holy, says in 1 Peter 1:17, "Since you call on

⁶μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου is located in first position in the clause.

⁷Law as mirror, revealing sin to produce sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Co 7:9)

⁸Personal modification of NIV translation; NIV reads "for" instead of "and in fact"

⁹Διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες ἔχωμεν χάριν, δι' ἧς λατρεύομεν εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους· καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκου.

a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here *in reverent fear* (ἐν φόβῳ)."¹⁰

Linking sanctification to fear may initially strike one as odd. We think of sanctification as a joyful response, and we most naturally associate fearing God with the recognition that God is a just judge who owes sinners punishment.¹¹ We think of terror. Fear is more precisely and broadly defined, though, in this way: the natural reaction to being in the presence of something that is to be seen as greater in a certain respect, either because of power or position or both. In the case of God, he is greater in every respect, both because of his position and because of his inherent power. When one is less than he, the appropriate reaction is to fear.

Now, it is true that fear can have different connotations depending on the nature of the relationship between the greater and the lesser. If the relationship is one of love, then "awe" and "respect" serve as accurate equivalents. If the relationship is one of deserved judgment, then "terror" is most appropriate. But whatever the relationship, the term "fear" defines the natural reaction toward one who is seen as greater in a certain respect.¹²

We might presume, then, that Scripture would define "fear of God" for a Christian simply in terms of "awe" and "respect." What we find in Hebrews and 1 Peter, though, moves us toward some additional precision. In Hebrews 12, the Spirit surrounds the command to serve God acceptably with reverence and awe with both "and in fact our God is a consuming fire" and "since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken." In 1 Peter 1, the command to "live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear" is immediately preceded by "if you call upon a Father who judges each man's work impartially" and then is followed by "for you know that . . . you were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ."

We fear God in connection with sanctified living, then, with both God as judge and God as Savior on our minds. This presents a challenge, because we are so accustomed to separating these divine functions insofar as we properly distinguish law and gospel. We know that the angels said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid" (Lk 2:10). In that

¹⁰καὶ εἰ πατέρα ἐπικαλεῖσθε τὸν ἀπροσωπολήμπως κρίνοντα κατὰ τὸ ἐκάστου ἔργον, ἐν φόβῳ τὸν τῆς παροικίας ὑμῶν χρόνον ἀναστράφητε.

¹¹This association is not without substance. Fear can be directly linked to expected punishment. See Zephaniah 3:7, Luke 12:5 and 1 John 4:18.

¹²It is for this reason that the Spirit uses φόβος to describe the proper attitude of a wife toward her husband (Ephesians 5:33; 1 Peter 3:2), of slaves toward their masters (Ephesians 6:5; 1 Peter 2:18), and even of a Christian toward his persecutor (1 Peter 3:15-16).

communication, there was no mention of God's role as avenging judge. The message was gospel, presenting God as Savior. We know that Paul warned those proudly judging others, "Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Ro 2:5). In those words, there was no mention of Jesus' role as suffering servant. The message was Law, presenting God as avenging judge.

We must distinguish these two roles of God. Yet as God remains not two, but one, we properly are not troubled when both God's role as judge and God's role as Savior are mentioned in the same breath. In particular, we are not disturbed when both roles are referenced in a context of encouragement to sanctified living. Referring to God as judge in such a context does not automatically imply a use of law which is inappropriate in a sanctification context, that of seeking to coerce outward obedience through fear. Rather, referring to God as judge in a sanctification context simply recognizes that this is what God is, in addition to being Savior, and this reality plays a role in our appreciation of God as one fully deserving of our awe and respect—our fear.

In addition, and perhaps more pointedly, a reference to God as judge is appreciated greatly by our New Man due to the Christian's status as both saint and sinner. Our acts of sanctification are pleasing to God only as they are motivated by a heart of thankfulness (Hebrews 11:28 "let us be thankful"); the saint in us exults in such service. Yet as our New Man also recognizes the enemy within, he treasures Spirit-given reminders of eternal judgment. Such reminders provide ammunition to assault the lie of the flesh, its suggestion that nothing bad will really happen if one lives contrary to God's will. No! God is not just Savior; he is also judge. The flesh must understand that only fear—that is, terror—awaits those who deny such a reality. This is not coercing godly behavior through fear. This is simply the New Man wielding a weapon of truth and exposing the flesh's deceit.

So, God's functions as both judge and Savior play a role in the reverence and awe—yes, the fear—which is a part of Christian sanctified living.

But is that the point in Philippians 2:12-13?

One might presume so, until one looks at the γάρ clause that follows Philippians 2:12. "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."

Rather than finding a reference to God as judge or God as Savior, we find information that addresses the "how" of sanctification.

It can properly be said that it is the individual Christian who desires to do God's will (Ro 7:18). It can properly be said that it is the Christian who does God-pleasing things (2 Co 8:4-5). It can properly be said that Paul, though the least of the apostles, worked harder than all of them (1 Co 15:10a).

Christians desire. Christians do. Christians work. The New Man in me is the real me. What he does I can call mine. And yet I can't. After Paul lays claim to working harder than the other apostles, he adds, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Co 15:10b).

Just as we can properly say "I believe" yet then confess that no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit, so we can speak of our lives of sanctification yet quickly add what Paul does in Philippians 2: God is the one working in you both to be wanting and to be doing that which is pleasing to him.

There are other places in Scripture which address God's dwelling in us. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Co 3:16), and Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17). There are other places in Scripture which speak of God working in us. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). "So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (2 Co 4:12).

Paul's words in Philippians 2:13 get most specific. He does not speak in only a general sort of way about God working in us. And he does not simply say that our actions and thoughts come *from* the Lord or that they are *empowered by* the Lord. Such descriptions are not inconsistent with what Paul says, but they don't reflect the totality of the Spirit's instruction. How can we describe our sanctification? Our very thoughts are "God-worked." Our very actions are "God-worked." God is the doer of our godly desires, and God is the doer of our godly actions. Yes, they are our desires. Yes, they are our actions. Yet Scripture compels us to say that it is not we who do them; it is God.¹³

What exactly does this mean? This means that God is working in you in powerful ways again and again in the course of a day. When you want to tackle the hard work that needs to get done, the work of serving your spouse or your congregation or your neighbor, it is God who has worked that desire inside of you. When confessed sin is on your lips and you long for the peace that goes beyond understanding, and in the battle of Spirit against flesh words squeeze through your lips,

¹³Perhaps the closest parallel to this most intimate description of God's role in our sanctified living is found in the second half of Ephesians 3:20. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, *according to his power that is at work within us* (κατα τὴν δύναμιν τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἡμῖν). . ."

words pleading with the Lord to forgive you, it is God who has brought those words to and through and out of your mouth. When you offer humble service to a fellow Christian or next-door neighbor, it is God who has produced that God-pleasing action.¹⁴

Where is God? What is God doing right now? How easy it can be to overlook just how involved God is in the fundamentals of our Christian living. He is not just the one who worked our salvation and who daily and richly forgives our sins. He is not just the one who will raise our mortal bodies on the Last Day. He is not only the one who hears our prayers and answers perfectly according to his will. And he is not simply the one who alone has power to sustain our spiritual life. It is not as if God does all those things, but when it comes to living a sanctified life, we are on our own. While it is certainly appropriate to note that the Lord addresses us in the realm of sanctification according to our New Man, appealing to the New Man's eager desire to be a cooperative partner in obedience, this in no way sets aside what Paul confesses: "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Co 15:10b).

It is the fact that God plays this role in our sanctified living that is the reason for our fear and trembling. "With fear and trembling continue to work out your own salvation, *for* God is the one working in you both to be wanting and to be working for his good pleasure"¹⁵

Yes, there are other times when fear is mentioned in a sanctification context, occasions when the reverence and awe and fear are connected directly to God's roles as Savior and Judge. Whenever God is mentioned, as is the case in Philippians 2:13, it is not inappropriate to be aware of all God tells us about himself, including his roles as Savior and Judge. But on this occasion, the fear and trembling are not explicitly connected to those roles. Rather, the fear and trembling are connected to God's work of producing our personal godly actions. We fear and tremble because it is God who does these things in us.

Why? Why does the reality that God is producing my godly thoughts and actions cause fear and trembling? Recall that "fear" is a recognition that one is in the presence of something that is to be seen as greater, either because of power or position or both. When a Christian comes to grips with precisely what's happening inside of him, his knees begin to shake.

¹⁴This is not to imply that our wicked flesh doesn't color our God-produced thoughts and actions. Finally, if we were to be judged based on our actions—which thankfully we are not—the evil insertions of our flesh are sufficient to leave us with nothing of our own that could bring us eternal benefit (Ro 7:24). This does not mean it is improper, however, to speak of a Christian doing good works. A Christian does good works, though surely "burdened with great weakness" (FC Ep. Art. IV Para. 11-13).

¹⁵Personal translation.

So rarely do we come face to face with raw power. We hear of others who have experienced the thunderous roar of a tornado. We might imagine—or perhaps have experienced—the blast of wartime explosives that toss bodies and suck air out of lungs. I think of our newborn son, for whom almost any power appears breathtaking. If he is moved quickly and senses that he might be in danger, the little muscles in his chin begin to quiver uncontrollably. Helpless. Overwhelmed.

So easily we can overlook a power that goes so far beyond any other power we might experience in these earthly realms. And it—he—is producing actions inside of and through us. Oh, that we would constantly consider just who it is who is at work within us! The one who creates my own godly thoughts and the one who works my own godly actions is God himself. While surely this leads me to desire in no way to resist this powerful working, even more does this lead me to see myself as the humblest of clay vessels. I operate with fear and trembling because I am so small, and I am in the presence of the greatest. And the greatest of all is working in me, producing works that in some incredible way are also mine.

There are many things about the true Christian faith that blow the mind. We need not stop putting the Trinity and incarnation and creation into that category. Sanctification belongs there too.

And as we marvel at it, we discover a refreshed and perhaps enlightened perspective on Christian living. Sanctification isn't simply a contest between my good intentions and the evil of my flesh; it is a contest between my flesh and God. God is the producer of godly thoughts in my own head, and it is God who makes godly words and deeds come from my lips and my hands. What confidence that gives me. Such truth also helps shape personal prayers for my own sanctification. "Dear Lord, you are the one who makes godly thoughts; you are the one who produces godly actions. Do that in my life according to your word." Finally, sanctification is not to be seen as the one burden that must be borne by an individual otherwise surrounded by grace; sanctification, at its most elemental level, is God himself at work. My sanctified Christian life is a place where the God of all creation is most intimately and powerfully in action.

Such awareness leads me energetically to pursue Christian living with fear and trembling. I treat sanctification not as mundane, but as a matter of divine importance. My eagerness to reflect Christ's love is serious, because it is God who is investing himself daily in my thinking and in my efforts. And in the end, I pursue Christian living with fear and trembling because at some level I don't understand . . . I don't understand exactly what it means that God himself could be creating my thoughts and producing my actions. I don't understand precisely

how this could be. All I know is that it is. It is the fact: God himself is crafting the good works of my mind, my lips, my hands, and my feet. And if that's true—and it is—and if it is mighty, and if it is divine, then it is no surprise that one's natural and inevitable reaction is one of fear and one of trembling. To witness a mighty act of God, whether it be the comparatively small matter of a tornado or the incredibly great matter of personal sanctification, leads my jaw to drop. And I sense my smallness. And I say, "Let me rededicate myself with great seriousness to living for God, my great and gracious and active dear Lord."

Philippians 2:12-13 present concepts that challenge, yet they are concepts which inspire. In summary, Paul is addressing Christians who have demonstrated already their humble servant love for the Lord and their neighbors. Paul affirms their understanding that such thankful living is a natural and inevitable component of authentic Christianity. He addresses them in verses 12 and 13 according to their New Man, encouraging them to bring about their own salvation. He is asking them not to craft a salvation that is founded on works rather than grace. Instead, he is addressing the concurrence of salvation with authentic Christianity, a Christianity that inevitably and joyfully includes thankful living. The New Man loves to be reminded of this reality, as it serves as an antidote to the lie of the flesh, a lie suggesting that sin can be embraced in the life of a Christian without danger. The New Man responds, "Yes, I will bring about my salvation—I will be saved—through a continued God-given embracing of authentic Christianity in all its respects. All this I do with fear and trembling, for I realize just who it is who is at work within me. The one who creates my godly thoughts and the one who works my godly actions is God himself. I see my smallness. I marvel at his greatness. I marvel most that the greatest of all is working in small me. This leads me to take sanctification seriously. I approach sanctification with confidence, with purpose, and with peace, for my sanctified Christian life is a place where the God of all creation is most intimately and powerfully at work.

May we stand in awe. May our knees quiver at the thought. With fear and trembling let us continue to work out our own salvation, for God is the one working in us both to be wanting and to be working for his good pleasure.