

January 19, 2014 by Steve Brandon



You Work; God Works

Philippians 2:12-13

This week, we continue in our verse-by-verse exposition of the wonderful epistle of Philippians. We come this morning to chapter 2 and verses 12 and 13. Let's read them together.

Philippians 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

In 1875 the Keswick Convention began to meet in Keswick, England. This convention became a central gathering place for the Higher Life movement when it was gaining ground in the United Kingdom. Fundamental to the Higher Life teaching was the importance of a second work of grace in your life, after your conversion. Some call it, "the second blessing" or "the second touch" or "being filled with the Holy Spirit". [\[1\]](#) With this second work of grace, Christians claim to gain a new perspective on their salvation and live a more holy and dedicated life of obedience to the Lord as a result.

Those who have experienced a second work of grace in their lives, will often encourage others to seek this same blessing in their lives as well. They will encourage others to seek the experience where they can be set free from their sin, to seek the experience where God will lead them to have greater passions for God than ever before.

Such a teaching transcends denominations. In charismatic circles, it goes like this, "I was saved when I believed in Jesus. But, it was five years later, when I was baptized with the Holy Spirit, that my Christian life became real to me." In fundamentalist circles, it goes like this, "I was saved when I walked the aisle at age eight. But, it was when I faced the effects of my sin that I really surrendered my life to Christ." In evangelical circles, it goes like this, "I accepted Jesus as my Savior when I was young. But, it was in college when I accepted Jesus as Lord of my life."

As one man summarized it like this, ...

Christians experience two 'blessings.' The first is getting "saved," and the second is getting serious. The change is dramatic: from a defeated life to a victorious life, from a lower life to a higher life, from a shallow life to a deeper life, from a fruitless life to a more abundant life, from being "carnal" to being "spiritual," from merely having Jesus as your Savior to making Jesus your Master. So how do people experience this second blessing? Through surrender and faith. [\[2\]](#)

Perhaps you have heard the slogan before: "Let go and let God." Now, there is a measure of truth in "Let go and let God." You wouldn't be able to have a yearly Bible Conference, as was with the Keswick Conference, without a measure of truth in these things. You can find a few verses in the Bible describing something like this.

Peter tells us to "cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). And as you cast your worries upon the Lord, He will help you. You let go of your concerns, and you let God help you. This is an Old Testament concept. David wrote, "Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you" (Psalm 55:22). Proverbs 3:5-6 teaches this. "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 your paths straight."

We even see it in Philippians, which we have been studying since September.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

That's why we have a Great High Priest. "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). That's why we seek the help of the Holy Spirit in our prayers. "He helps our weakness" (Romans 8:26). We say, "Enough with my problems. Lord, I give them to you!" And so, in some degree, we do, "Let go and let God."

However, like many doctrines of the Bible, if "let go and let God" is your only theology of sanctification, you are missing a large portion of Scripture. Literally, there are hundreds of texts calling us to exertion in our sanctification, one of which is our text this morning. These texts call us to fight and strive and wage war.

Jesus said it this way, "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of

your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell." (Matthew 5:29-30). Jesus says that we need to be prepared to take some drastic action in our fight against sin, even to the point of poking out our eye or lopping off our hand if need be. The consequences are heaven and hell.

In another place, Jesus said, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13:24). In other words, we are to take great pains in seeking the kingdom of God. Some will seek to enter, but won't; presumably, because they weren't putting forth the effort.

Paul said it this way in Ephesians 6: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Eph 6:10-12). The picture is warfare. We need to take up our armor and stand and fight against the devil. He shoots flaming arrows at us (Ephesians 6:16). We need to be able to extinguish them.

When Paul describes his life, he describes it as a battle that he fought. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7). He sounds like a victorious warrior. He fought the enemy well and came back from the battle alive to tell about it.

Peter continued the theme. "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11). Again, notice the "war" terminology. We are at war. Our fleshly lusts "wage war" against our souls. Our eternity is at stake. "Those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." (1 Peter 5:19).

The will of God for our lives often means that we suffer, and suffering is no bed of roses. It is hard and it puts us through painful times. But such is our calling. And the writer to the Hebrews says it this way, "[without] holiness ... no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14).

These verses are a far cry from "let go and let God." When the Keswick convention was in its early days, really pounding this doctrine, J. C. Ryle responded with a series of 20 sermons, which eventually found their way into a book appropriately entitled, "Holiness." Deep in the introduction, Ryle writes, ...

Is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to think so much of fighting and struggling against sins, but ought rather to 'yield themselves to God', and be passive in the hands of Christ? Is this according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

...

But the plain truth is, that men will persist in confounding two things that differ -- that is, justification and sanctification. In justification the word to be addressed to man is "Believe," only believe; in sanctification the word must be: "Watch, pray, and fight." What God had divided let us not mingle and confuse. [\[3\]](#)

Lest you think that this doctrine was only around a hundred years ago, think again. It is very much alive and well today. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of love for the gospel -- that Jesus came and died for us, removing the wrath of God that was due to come upon us, redeeming us from our sins, reconciling us to the Father. But with such a love for the work of Christ, there can be this tendency toward slackness in the way that we live. Since we stand uncondemned before the Father, what more do we need to do?

So, Kevin DeYoung has taken up the mantle and written his own book about these matters, appropriately entitled, "The Hole in our Holiness." That's why Kevin DeYoung's book is subtitled, "Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness." DeYoung writes in his first chapter, ...

Among conservative Christians there is sometimes the mistaken notion that if we are truly gospel-centered we won't talk about rules or imperatives or moral exertion. We are so eager not to confuse indicatives (what God has done) and imperatives (what we should do) that we get leery of letting biblical commands lead uncomfortably to conviction of sin. We're scared of words like diligence, effort, and duty. Pastors don't know how to preach the good news in their sermons and still strongly exhort churchgoers to cleanse themselves from every defilement of body and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). We know legalism (salvation by law keeping) and antinomianism (salvations without the need for law keeping) are both wrong, but antinomianism feels like a much safer danger. [\[4\]](#)

And thus comes the "Hole in our Holiness."

Well, this morning as we dive into Philippians, my hope is to set before you a thoroughly Biblical perspective of sanctification. Because that's what we have in our text this morning. The text speaks of what we do in our sanctification. The text speaks of what God does in our sanctification. Let's read it again, ...

Philippians 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Now, one of the things that you may have noticed when I read these verses it that they don't mention our "sanctification." Rather, they

mention (in verse 12) our "salvation." So, you might ask, "Steve, what's up with that? Are these verses speaking about sanctification? Or, are these verses speaking about salvation?"

That's a good question. To that, I point out that at the end of verse 12, we see Paul's exhortation is to "work out your salvation." He doesn't say, "work for your salvation," which of course would be unbiblical, as we don't work for our salvation. "[God] saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Paul doesn't say, "work for your salvation." No, he says, "work out your salvation."

In other words, he is saying: Philippians, you have been saved through the gospel of Christ. God has redeemed you. And now, work out what that looks like.

And what does it look like? It looks like unity through humility. Because that's what the context is speaking about. In fact, that's the point of verse 12, which begins with, "so then." This takes us back. And in many ways, it goes back to chapter 1, and verse 27. Turn back there. Let's read it...

Philippians 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

This is the point of the whole book of Philippians. You have received the gospel. You have joined in the gospel. And now, Philippians, let's walk worthy of the gospel.

What does that mean? It means that you are "standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). It means that you are walking in unity with one another, seeking to live out the gospel in community. You are seeking to participate in the spread of the gospel together. When God saves an individual, He saves him into a community of others who believe. And a life "worthy of the gospel of Christ" will work itself out in unity among the brethren.

We see it again in chapter 2, verses 1 and 2.

Philippians 2:1-2

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

Again, we see the emphasis upon unity. If the gospel is really true in your life (verse 1), then let's see it work itself out (verse 2):

Philippians 2:2

make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

The life worthy of the gospel will seek out this unity among other believers. How can this be? In a room full of a hundred people, you often have a hundred different opinions. How can we all be unified? Paul's answer: humility.

That's what verses 3 and 4 are about. Look at verse 3, ...

Philippians 2:3-4

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

That's the way that unity happens -- when we see out the interests of others above ourselves. That's what Christ did in the incarnation. That's what we celebrated last month when we celebrated Christmas. That's the attitude that we ought to have. Verse 5 says, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ came in the flesh. Christ "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (verse 8). Therefore God highly exalted Him above every name (verses 9-11). "So then, ..."

Philippians 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Well, let's dig into the text. This is the title of my message this morning: "You Work; God Works." My title happens to be the same as my outline. We see our work in verse 12, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." We see God's work in verse 13, "for it is God who is at work in you."

- 1. You Work (verse 12)**
- 2. God Works (verse 13)**

In both verses, we have the same Greek verb. Perhaps you recognize it. Pronounced, "energeo", it's the Greek word from which we get our word, "energy." When it comes to living the Christian life, we are to put energy into living it out. In fact, the verb in verse 12 is an intensified form of this word. We are to work hard and spend ourselves in this matter. This is unlike much of the teaching of the Higher Life movement as taught in the early days of the Keswick convention.

So, let's look here at verse 12, ...

1. You Work (verse 12)

Philippians 2:12

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

Now, before Paul gets to the command, he has some very encouraging things to say first. And these things help to soften the blow of his command to work hard. This is ...

a. A loving command.

Philippians 2:12

So then, my beloved, ...

The love that Paul had for the Philippians is obvious throughout the entire book. Back in chapter 1, Paul was rejoicing over the Philippians, that they had participated in the gospel "from the first day until now" (1:5). He rejoiced that they had participated from when the gospel first came to Philippi to the day when Paul was writing this letter. Paul was rejoicing with the Lord for the church in Philippi.

In verse 7 (of chapter 1), Paul said, "I have you in my heart" (1:7). He said, "I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (1:8). This is genuine love that Paul had for the Philippians.

In the last half of chapter 2, Paul will speak of his desire to come and see them (2:24). We see his longing to be with them in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown" (4:1). So, calling them "beloved" isn't some formal title. No, it is a genuine feeling from his heart.

The effect is that this command to work out your salvation comes from love. This isn't some harsh and uncaring command of a tyrant. No, this is the admonition of one who loves you. In fact, this is the best thing for the Philippians, that they would work out their salvation.

And I say to you as well, church family, that this is good counsel. It is good for you to give much effort toward working out of your salvation. It is good for you to seek the Lord. It is good for you to be in His Word. It is good for you to humble yourself. It is good for you to seek out unity in the body. This is a loving command. This is also ...

b. An encouraging command.

We find this in the next phrase in verse 12, "just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence." Those in Philippi would find this encouraging, because Paul says, I already see that you obey the Lord. When I was with you, you were obedient to the Lord. And now that I'm away from you, I have heard that you are obedient to the Lord.

Paul saw the Philippians obey the Lord. After all, Paul was the one who brought the gospel to Philippi. You can read about it in Acts 16. He and Silas went to that place of prayer down by the river, and preached the gospel to Lydia who believed. He and Silas were able to point the Philippians jailer to Jesus: "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). And though Paul was urged by the authorities to leave town on another missionary journey, he came and visited them.

And what did he see? He saw them obedient to the Lord. They were submitting their lives to the Lord. They were doing what the Lord said.

But, now, he is apart from them. He is under house arrest in Rome. And he heard (probably through Epaphroditus) how they have been doing in his absence. And the news is good. Isn't this the true test of obedience. What do you do when no one is looking at you? What do you do in the closet? What do you do when your parents aren't around? What do you do when the pastor isn't around?

I remember growing up in our neighborhood. We had a party house right across the street from us. You knew whenever the parents were out of town, because there would be a whole bunch of cars outside their house. You could hear loud music being played in the house, and the noise went until the wee hours of the morning. The kids at that house were rebellious.

I'm thankful for submissive, obedient children at our house. A few weeks ago when Yvonne and I were able to get away and do some writing. We were gone for 5 days. We holed up in a hotel and worked hard on the manuscript of this book, "Passing by the Field." It was a wonderful time. We exercised each morning. We edited the manuscript for the book all day. Several nights we had our food delivered, so that we could keep going. Each evening ended with a hot tub before bed. While we were gone, we left our children home alone.

I'm thankful that we can entrust the house to them. Now, things weren't perfect. Yvonne said that she struggled with her "re-entry" back into normal life. They failed on several accounts to read the list of duties to perform in our absence, like laundry and cleaning and taking out the trash. But, for the most part, things were found in good order.

But, this is the true test of obedience: what are you going to do when no one is looking. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the great Scottish preacher, once said, "What a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more." When it's just you and God, all alone, and you are obedient. That's genuine obedience.

What is remarkable here is that Paul said that their obedience has even increased when he was gone -- "...now, *much more* in my absence." In other words, they were even more zealous for the Lord when Paul was away from them than when Paul was with them!

When you are away from the presence of your authority, and you still obey; when you are away from the presence of your authority, and you obey still further; that is when you know that your obedience is genuine. And that's what was taking place in the lives of those in Philippi. And they should have been encouraged by these words.

Paul wasn't piling on things for them to do. He wasn't laying a burden upon them too high for them to bear. They were doing well. Paul was merely encouraging them to continue on in their obedience. Which, by the way, helps to explain what exactly Paul means by "working out your salvation." He means by this that we are to obey the Lord. Do you see the connection?

Philippians 2:12

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation (by continuing to obey the Lord) with fear and trembling;

And so, church family, I would exhort you in the same way. I would exhort you with love. I would exhort you with encouragement. Walk in obedience.

This is what a life worthy of the gospel looks like. It looks like a life of obedience. Yes, we are saved by grace. Yes, we are saved apart from our works. But, we are saved "for good works."

We know Ephesians 2:8-9 well, ...

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

But, do you know verse 10?

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

God saves us unto obedience. So work after your obedience. Labor long and hard to obey the Lord. We see this in the familiar passage (which we will come to in our exposition in several months), Philippians 3:9-16, ...

Philippians 3:9-16

and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

Verse 9 is all gospel. Then we see Paul "reaching forward to what lies ahead" (verse 13) and "press[ing] on toward the goal" (verse 14). In verse 15 he calls the Philippians to, "have this attitude".

In our text today, the last four words of verse 12 give us our attitude in doing so, "with fear and trembling." With these words, Paul brings out how serious this exhortation is. Remember when Jesus spoke about gouging out your eye or hacking off your hand? It was a matter of eternity (Matthew 5:29-30). Don't go to hell with your sinful eye or your sinful hand. Leave them on the earth and go to heaven.

Many times, this is how we obey the Lord. We have a godly fear in us that chooses the right rather than the wrong. Proverbs 8:13 says, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil." When motivated by a healthy fear of the Lord, we will hate the evil ways and walk in righteousness.

The fear of the LORD is often the power that will stir us on to do good, even when nobody is watching. Proverbs 15:3 tells us, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good." Yes, we are loved with an everlasting love in the gospel. Yes, grace has come to those who believe, and God will not take that away. But, such realities don't remove our fear of the LORD. We fear Him and so we walk in obedience.

Verse 13 helps us to understand this fear. It begins with the word, "for." That's an explaining word. It explains why it is that we should "work out our salvation with fear and trembling."

Philippians 2:13
for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

And here we come to my second point.

2. God Works (verse 13)

And the fact that God works in our salvation should lead us to fear. Do you understand the connection? We work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because God is the one who is working in us! And if He would remove His hand from us, our obedience to the Lord would cease. In other words, try as hard as we might, our obedience to the Lord is ultimately dependent upon Him.

Now, indeed, we work. That's the point of verse 12! But, the greater reality is this -- God is at work in us (verse 13). So, as you think about these two points -- You Work (verse 12) and God Works (verse 13) -- don't think of them as competing realities. In other words, don't think that you do your part and God does His part, and you happily meet in the middle. Don't think of it as a sort of agreement, as in, "I have done my part. God, you have done your part! We have met in the middle and we are happy!" That's not what verse 13 is saying.

Verse 13 is saying that the entire reason why we work out our salvation with so much effort, so much fear and trembling, is because God is the one working in us to give us the desire and to give us the strength. The desire comes from God's "willing." The strength comes from God's "working."

So, think about it this way. We are working and laboring and striving in our obedience to the Lord. But, were the curtains pulled back and we could see everything, we would see God's hand all around our hand as we work. And the reason we work is because God is working in us! And the strength we have to work is because God gives the strength! And would God remove His hand, we would go nowhere. That ought to put a healthy fear into your life of obedience.

Now, we can rest upon the promise of Philippians 1:6 that God won't pull back.

Philippians 1:6
For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

But, we need to realize that our sanctification is ultimately dependent upon the Lord. John Piper said it well in his book, "When I Don't Desire God." Chapter 3 is entitled, "The Call to Fight for Joy in God."

Philippians 2:12-13 describes how Christian work is enabled by the work of God within us. "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." God's work in us does not eliminate our work; it enables it. We work because he is the one at work in us. Therefore, the fight for joy is possible because God is fighting for us and through us. All our efforts are owing to his deeper work in and through our willing and working. This is why I say our fight for joy is a gift of God. [\[4\]](#)

Let me see if I can explain. I want to read from the book that Yvonne and I finished editing a few weeks ago. I just received a few proof copies from the printer. I want to read for you the lesson entitled, "Making Cookies".

Picture in your mind a little girl who longs to make some cookies. Because she is too young to do things herself, her mother needs to help her. The little girl needs help reading the recipe, finding the ingredients, measuring the right amounts, and mixing the ingredients. She needs help placing the dough on the cookie sheet (not in her mouth), placing them in the oven, setting the timer, and safely taking the cookies out of the oven. In the end, she proudly announces, "Look at the cookies I made."

Now, certainly, she made them, but it was her mother, behind the scenes, who gave direction and counsel and a helping hand wherever needed. Likewise, when we serve the Lord, we may take credit for doing the work. But all the while, it is God who is "working in us that which is pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13:21). [\[5\]](#)

This is the picture of Philippians 2:12-13. We obey the Lord, because the Lord is working within us. This teaching is all over the Bible. I want to finish my message this morning by looking at a handful of passages that teach this very thing. May it lead us into a holy fear, knowing that things are ultimately in the hand of the Lord. So, get your fingers ready and let's see God in action.

Let's begin by going forward just one page. Colossians, chapter 1 and the last two verses of the chapter. Paul speaks about his ministry.

Colossians 1:28-29
We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Paul's ministry goals are lofty. He wants to proclaim Christ far and wide to every man. He wants to present every man complete in Jesus Christ (verse 28). Every man believing. Every man walking with the Lord. Every man resting in Christ.

So, how does he do it? With great intensity and passion and work and effort (verse 29). "I labor." But, where does he get the energy? From God: "... striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." There you see it. Paul is laboring hard. But, the greater reality is that God is the one laboring within him. And were Paul to be asked, "Paul, how is it that you labor so hard for the gospel?" He would say, "It's not me! It's God doing His work in me."

In fact, this is almost exactly what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15. So, turn over there.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

I love Paul's perspective here. "I am the least" "I am not worthy to be called an apostle." "I resisted the work of God -- persecuting the church!" "But, God was working in me. So much so that I labored more than all of the apostles. I labored more than Peter. I labored more than James. I labored more than John. I labored more than Andrew or Thomas or Matthew or Philip or Bartholomew. And yet, was it me? No. It was God's grace with me."

Again, we see the same picture. Paul labors. And yet, the reason for his laboring is the grace of God, who labors in him.

Let's try Jesus. So, turn over to John 15, that great passage, where Jesus describes Himself as the vine, and us as His branches. Jesus said, ...

John 15:4-5

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

There is a connectedness between the vine and the fruit. The vine will bring forth no fruit if it is not connected to the life-giving resources of the vine. When connected with the vine, the branch will bring forth fruit. Now, it comes down to this. What is ultimately the source of the fruit? It's the vine. And the reality is this: you can try to bring forth all of the fruit you want, but it is the greater reality of the vine that makes it all possible. Jesus said, "apart from Me you can do nothing" (verse 5).

Let's try from the Old Testament, in Psalm 127, ...

Psalm 127:1-2

Unless the Lord builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the Lord guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early,
To retire late,
To eat the bread of painful labors;
He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.

You can labor long and hard to build a house or a city, and if God isn't in the work, your labor is totally in vain. Likewise, you can go to church and read your Bible and even memorize large portions of Scripture. And if God isn't in the work, your labor is totally in vain because He is the One who ultimately brings forth prosperity in our labor.

Finally, let's finish up by looking at Hebrews 13, at the end, the concluding prayer to the entire letter.

Hebrews 13:20-21,

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Who's doing the equipping? Who's doing the empowering? It is the Lord who equips us to do "every good thing." It is the Lord who equips us "to do His will." How? By "working in us that which is pleasing in His sight." God is the one working obedience in us.

You Work (verse 12); God Works (verse 13). So, let us work our salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who is at work in us to will and to work for His good pleasure.

I close with C. S. Lewis, ...

Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense his own already. So that when we talk of a man doing anything for God or giving anything to God, I will tell you what it is really like. It is like a small child going to its father and saying, "Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present." It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction. [7]

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 19, 2014 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_Life_movement

[2] <https://www.logos.com/product/6490/let-go-and-let-god-a-survey-and-analysis-of-keswick-theology>

[3] J.C. Ryle, "Holiness," p. xxvi.

[4] Kevin DeYoung, "The Hole In Our Holiness," p. 19.

[5] John Piper, "When I Don't Desire God," p. 41.

[6] Steve Brandon, "Passing By the Field," p. 105.

[7] C.S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity," chapter 11, "Faith."