

Opening Words

I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

Paul's confidence and God's work! Did you see them both?

07 Phil – You are the Work of God

Are you a person of confidence? I don't mean a person of pride or over-confidence, but do you tend to be confident about yourself, about outcomes to situations? I know part of this has to do with the kind of personality God gave us. Some people seem to be born with confidence, and others, well, they just never think anything will ever go right. I was born with a personality that is a mixture of the two. If I was on the baseball diamond, I was loud and boisterous and a leader. I was a ballplayer. I tended to be that way with my studies – I was confident in my scholastic ability.

But in other situations – I was that negative, scared, social misfit who was afraid to put one foot in front of the other, and that really bothered me. One day, I was reading 2 Corinthians 3:4-5 which says “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves but our adequacy is from God.” That verse struck a deep chord within me. I took an afternoon off and went into a library and proceeded to look up every place in the New Testament where the word “confidence” or “boldness” was used. I then prayed through those verses – “God, you know my weaknesses in this area. I call upon you to change my life and make me a man of Christ-like confidence.”

Months later, one of the church members came up to me and said, “Jonathan, I don't know what it is about you but you seem different, in a good way.” When I asked this person to be more specific she said, “You're more confident.”

That put a big smile on my face as I knew God was at work in my life.

In the verse we are going to look at today, Philippians 1:6, as we continue our series in Philippians – Ancient Faith for Modern Times – these themes of confidence and God's work in us comes through.

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Part of my study and prayer for confidence in my life led me to a dictionary. I asked myself – “what is confidence?” When I looked it up I learned that the word itself means *with faith*. In Latin con = with and fide = faith. The full definition is *full belief in the trustworthiness or reliability of a person or thing*.

And so I ask the same question that I started with, are you a person of confidence? Are you a person with full belief in the trustworthiness or reliability of another person?

But there is an even more important question – “who is the person in whom we put confidence?” Our confidence must be in the Lord.

One of the greatest examples of confidence, of full belief in a person, was George Muller. He lived in the 19th century and is famous for his work with orphans and the amazing answers to prayer that he experienced.

With an ever growing group of children around him, Muller often exhausted all resources, but his confidence was in the Lord to supply all their needs. One day, they had no food for the children, and it was time to eat. Muller sat everyone down, had everyone bow their heads, and proceeded to thank God for the food they were about to eat. Just as that moment, a knock was heard on their door, they went to the door, and found a supply of food for everyone. Now that’s confidence!

In a similar way, Paul was confident that God was going to come through for these people in Philippi. He was confident that what God had started would not wither away but would grow stronger and would be perfected until the day of Christ’s return.

Paul’s confidence has three aspects to it. First, he was confident that what had started in Philippi was God’s work for he speaks of the good work that God had begun. I wonder if, when Paul wrote these words, he thought back to those beginning days when Lydia was saved, when he cast the demon out of the slave girl, and when God sent the earthquake and the jailer was saved? Clearly, the work in Philippi was a work of God.

Second, Paul shows us that what God had started he would continue. Paul speaks of God perfecting it. I like how the NIV translates this verse: *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion*. God will carry on what he has started.

Third, God will carry on the work until Christ returns. In this verse we have salvation past – our justification – for Paul speaks of God beginning the good work. We have salvation present – God sanctifying us – for he speaks of God continuing the work. And we have salvation future – the completion when Jesus Christ comes again.

From beginning to end the work is the work of God. This does not mean that we do nothing – we have to trust God and obey, but our salvation from beginning to end is of the Lord. It is the work of God.

I am reminded of that great passage in Ephesians 2:8-10 that tells us that we are not saved by works but by grace through faith and that we are the workmanship of God.

And here in Philippians 1:6 Paul talks about God beginning, continuing, and finishing a good work in his people. What joy! What confidence this inspires. What a God we serve!

Do you have this kind of confidence that what God has started in you, he will carry on to completion?

Some of you may not even have confidence that God has started a work in you. Are you confident that you belong to Christ? The apostle John wrote an entire book we know as 1 John that explores this very theme. He lists three ways by which people could know if they have passed out of death into life. Do you have a growing love for God's people or are you indifferent or even have hatred for some of them? Do you see increasing righteousness or at least a hunger for right living in your life, or, are you indifferent to sin or do you revel in sin? Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that he has come in the flesh, died for your sins and rose again bodily or have you gone over to strange mystical beliefs that are not in the Gospels? Look at your life, John says, and look at your beliefs and then see which side you are on – the side of darkness and death or the side of light and life.

If you cannot say today, as you listen to my words, that you are in Christ, then I would urge you to bow your head and heart to him right now and ask him to start his work in you. Ask him to forgive you of your sins, justify you, and start changing your life.

Follow me in this prayer – “Dear Lord Jesus, I realize right now that I don't belong to you, but I want to. I turn from my selfish life, my lack of love, my lack of righteous living, my lack of truth, and I turn to you. Forgive me of my sins. Come into my life and make me a new person. Amen.”

For those of you who are already in Christ, I want to encourage you to see that God is always at work in you. I want to encourage you that what God starts, he finishes. In my life I have at times been discouraged. I have felt like I'll never get victory over this sin, or I'll always be bound to that character flaw, or that God will never come through and bless me. But as I have continued in my journey I have discovered that God has been at work all along to accomplish His will in my life.

1 Thessalonians 5:24 says, “God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.” Psalm 138:8 says, The Lord will work out his plans for my life for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever.” What great reminders! Salvation is God's work and here in Philippians

1:6 Paul says that “God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished.”

God’s work primarily consists of three things in our lives:

1. It is about the building of His character in us. ~~You were made in God’s image, to reflect his character but sin has broken, marred, and polluted that image so that you no longer perfectly reflect Him. But His work in us is to repair what sin has broken. His work is to put the pieces of our broken lives together.~~
2. It is about him fitting us for service to strengthen the church. ~~God’s grace is for more than forgiveness. It is about equipping us to make a difference in His church. God has given you at least one spiritual gift. He wants you to discover your gift, develop it, and use in helping other Christians to grow. You can make a difference in others.~~
3. It is about him fitting us for service to help carry out the Great Commission. ~~God has given all of us the Great Commission—the command to make disciples of all the nations. You can make a difference in the world as you share your faith with others.~~

God wants you to have confidence - full belief in His trustworthiness and reliability to finish what He has started in these three areas. He will make you a man or woman of Christ-like character. He will use you to build up the Church. He will use you to reach other people.

I want to make one more comment from this passage. Paul said, “it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News.⁸ God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

Paul was a passionate man. Did you catch it in these verses? He spoke of his feelings, his heart, and his tender compassion for them. Paul was confident because of God’s faithfulness and because he saw God working love deep within his heart for these people.

“I have you in my heart,” he said. “We have been through a lot together – when I have been defending and confirming the Gospel in public places and even when I have been in jail. In whatever situation I have found myself, you have been standing with me and sharing in God’s favor, or grace, with me.

It was quite a partnership Paul had with this church. Those are the kinds of partnerships God wants to develop today between churches and leaders of churches. When we experience this together, with one another, and for one another, we will see our confidence in God’s work in our hearts and in our united ministry for his glory. We will say with Paul, “I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” May God do this for us.