

Here is a statement from Paul that confuses many Christians.

*Therefore, 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**, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.* (Philippians 2:12-13)

Should we constantly live in fear and tremble in the presence of God? We might struggle over Paul's words because they appear to be saying that we should. But it doesn't fit with the rest of his writing. So what are we to do? And what is it saying that we should work for our salvation? I thought it was our faith in Jesus that provided our salvation.

In the Hebrew culture there are two concepts that Paul might be using that will bring this into focus.

We have seen before that **salvation** is a relationship with God and in the Hebraic understanding, salvation begins during our lives, it is not just something to look forward to after death. Consequently, someone who has not come to this relationship is estranged from the family of God. What is often referred to as a "lost soul".

Salvation comes through restoring our relationship with God the Father by believing and accepting the redeeming work of His Son, Jesus. It is then that we are rescued from a life separated from God. The phrase "eternal life" could be used to describe life in relationship with God, here on earth and extending into eternity. (see Study 30) Eternity for us begins when our relationship with God is restored.

In John 17:1-3 (CJB), John relates Jesus' prayer to the Father: *After Yeshua (Jesus) had said these things, he looked up toward heaven and said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son may glorify you, just as you gave him authority over all mankind, so that he might give eternal life to all those whom you have given him. And eternal life is this: to know you, the one true God, and him whom you sent, Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah (Christ).*

Unless we understand eternal life as life in relationship with God, both now and in the future, this verse makes no sense. There are many scriptures that speak of salvation in the future, in terms of being saved from judgment. But those scriptures fit nicely into the concept of eternity beginning now and continuing into the future.

Paul even says, "*By grace you **have been** saved...*" (Eph. 2:5). In making this statement he uses the past tense, not the future tense. He is stating that our salvation has already happened.

The **Fear of God** has probably been one of the most misunderstood concepts over the millennia. In the Old Testament the Hebrew words are (*yireh adonai*) which has usually been translated as "the fear of the Lord". The problem comes from two directions. One that translating *yireh* only as fear misses the other meaning of the word, which is reverence. And secondly slaves and underlings were taught to literally fear their masters, because if they displeased their master they could face punishment or even death.

The Hebraic concept of *yireh adonai* is used in the scriptures meaning an awe and reverence for God that causes us to want to do His will. It does mean to respect God, who will discipline those whom He loves. *I rebuke and discipline everyone I love; so exert yourselves, and turn from your sins!* (Rev. 3:19). What we don't pick up when we read this verse is that it is done in love. The emphasis is on a positive, respectful relationship with God, not in terms of being terrified of Him.

Moses said to Israel in Deut. 10:12: *And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear (respect and obey) the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul?*

Proverbs also has this same concept: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* Prov. 9:10

In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death. Prov. 14:26-27

If having a "fear" of the Lord causes us to live with integrity and wisdom about God's ways, and it will ultimately transform us. Paul is exhorting us to live eternal lives by our obedient relationship with God. Then we can see Him working out His plans to redeem every aspect of our lives. We can be enjoying the richness of our relationship with the Lord now while on this earth, as well as look to a future beyond our physical death.