

Please turn in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2. Last week the Apostle Paul urged us to look to the example of Christ in His humiliation and exaltation and to “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” This coming off the heels of a great teaching on the need for unity and humility within the Church. This great theme of humility continues in our text today with an exhortation to humility live in light of the work of Christ. With this in mind let us turn our attention now to the reading of God’s Word from Philippians chapter 2 beginning at verse 12.

Read Philippians 2:12-13

Pray

Tomorrow many of our brothers and sisters around the world will join in giving thanks to the Lord for something that happened over five centuries ago. On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg Germany. This act sparked the Protestant Reformation, an event which quite literally changed the world. We may not be here today, worshipping in this building, if it had not been for that event. There may not be a Reformed Presbyterian Church as we know it if that Augustinian monk had not boldly stood against the papist church in defense of the truths of Scripture. It is from the Protestant Reformation that we see developed the doctrines known as the five solas: sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, sola Scriptura, and soli Deo gloria; salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone. The core doctrines of the Christian faith were reexamined and recovered during the early part of the Reformation. The glorious truths of the Gospel, which had laid dormant or in the shadows for so long (not unlike the Law being hidden away in the Temple in Israel for hundreds of years) was recovered and published to the masses (much like the recovery of the Law under the reign of King Josiah). Essential doctrines such as justification by faith alone, penal substitutionary atonement, and the authority of Scripture were all brought to the forefront of thought in the Church. The doctrine of

sanctification was one of these doctrines, though so often many tend to forget how great a recovery the biblical understanding of sanctification was. Here in our text this morning Paul speaks to this great doctrine and its connection not simply to humility but the person and work of Christ Jesus. He urges the saints at Philippi to let sanctification flow from a knowledge of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. He does this by giving a simple charge which I give to you as, brothers and sisters: as the Lord works sanctification in you, you must work it out in your life. We will consider this charge under three headings: first, sanctification defined; next, sanctification necessary; and finally, sanctification worked.

The beginning portion of this sermon will be more teaching-oriented than how I normally preach, but it's vitally important that we understand this doctrine rightly in order to not misinterpret what Paul is saying here in this passage. So let us first consider sanctification defined. Throughout church history there have been various views concerning the doctrine of sanctification. Augustine, while expounding many of the truths of Scripture that we as Reformed believers embrace, made a major error in his formulation of the doctrine of sanctification. He essentially conjoined sanctification into the act of justification, conflating the two. This would eventually be developed further through men such as Thomas Aquinas and would lead to the official teaching of the papacy. The Romanists conflated these two distinct doctrines, viewing sanctification as a part of justification, while led them to embrace a works-based system of doctrine. That system of doctrine would then be challenged from Scripture by the Reformers, who saw not a conflation but a clear distinction between justification and sanctification. They articulated this distinction by highlighting that justification is a once for all act of God while sanctification is a progressive work of God in the life of the believer. What is sanctification? According to Westminster Shorter Catechism question and answer 35, "Sanctification is a work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and to live

unto righteousness.” In other words, sanctification is God working within you to make you more holy and spur you on to works of righteousness.

There are two errors which must be corrected when it comes to this doctrine. The first is legalism. This is what is seen in any works-based system of doctrine. Some of you here may know people who hold to this view; you may even have family members who embrace this heresy. Legalism, in regards to sanctification, comes when there is that conflation of justification and sanctification that was mentioned previously. What the papists believe is contrary to this doctrine of Paul, who elsewhere places blessedness in remission of sins, and shows eternal life is the gift of God, Rom. 4:6–7, Rom. 6:23; and we are saved by grace, not of works, Rom. 3:20, Rom. 3:24–25, Rom. 4:16, Eph. 2:8, Titus 3:5 and is contrary to the main point Paul is making, which is to beat down pride and conceit of deserving, and persuade believers to humility. But it’s easy to pick on the papists; they’re somewhat low hanging fruit. However, this error is not confined to those within the Roman church, but had bled into those of a Protestant heritage and even those who claim to be Reformed. One of the bigger groups who hold to a similar view is the Church of Christ who believe that God does His part and you have to do yours. They hold to a works righteousness and believe that you can lose your salvation much like the papists. But perhaps the one that is a bit closer to home is the Federal Visionists. Their doctrine of sanctification is virtually indistinguishable from Rome. They hold to a belief that you are in the covenant by baptism but kept in the covenant by your faithfulness. They will cloud their teaching with redefined orthodox Reformed language, but do not be deceived by them. Their doctrines are straight from the pit of hell.

But there is another side to this coin, one which may even be a tendency in your own heart. That is the heresy of antinomianism. This error denies the obligation of the Law of God in the lives of believers. This is a view that has taken off in mainstream evangelicalism. It is seen in those who say they are saved so they’re

good, and is a byproduct of the erroneous teaching of once saved always saved. Popular men such as Tullian Tchividjian have popularized this error and caused it to poison the Church. To deny the abiding obligation of the Law for believers is absolutely contrary to the Word of God. But maybe you're sitting there thinking that this isn't you, that you know believers are obligated to obey the Law of the Lord. I'll tell you right now, every time you sin you show the antinomianism of your heart. Every time you chose the pleasures of this world, the gratification of self, you state with your actions that you do not see yourself beholden to the Law of God. Every time you neglect the commands and ordinances of God you are making yourself the ruler of your heart and denying Christ His rightful spot on the throne of your heart. Sanctification is not earning your salvation through works-righteousness, nor is it something that was simply given to you at your justification which permits you to live however you want. It is so much more, so much greater than either of these errors.

There are obligations placed upon believers, but these obligations in no way merit righteousness or earn salvation. This leads us now to consider that sanctification is necessary. Let's look back at verse 12 of our passage, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Paul is not thinking here of any good works you may contribute to your salvation, but about how you are to respond to the salvation which is yours already in Christ. You are not to work for it or work it up but work it out, to make sure that its influence and implications permeate the entirety of your lives. Sanctification is a lifelong process of obedience in which you see what Christ has done for you and live your life in light of it. Remember, believer, that there is a holiness without which no man will see the Lord. Paul says in Ephesians 2, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." And this is for a purpose, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God

hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” You cannot have salvation by grace through faith without being created for good works. It is impossible to continue in sin that grace may abound.

Paul makes it plain that this is your own responsibility to walk to in ways of the Lord. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Salvation has to be worked out. Yes, it is a free gift of God as we saw in Ephesians 2. But ultimately salvation means the transformation of your hearts and minds and lives into the likeness of Christ. This means that, like Christ, you are to become obedient, bearing the fruit of the Spirit. The fact that you are in a right relationship with God demands that you live out the practical implications of that relationship. The word that Paul uses here translated as ‘work out’ means that there is a constant conscious effort that you make, working at it until it is completed. The salvation that you have in Christ must transform every aspect of your life. And this working out salvation must be done with fear and trembling. Paul is highlighting for us that we must always be mindful of how we are living. Nothing is hidden from God. No secret sin will remain secret in the last great day. Friends, you are living before the face of God. There should always be a sense of awe in the life of the believer; a sense of living where you are always visible, always understood through and through. The day will come when you will stand before the judgement seat of God and will give an account for every word and deed in your life. If you are not clothed in the righteousness of Christ, empowered by the Spirit unto all good works, living your life in conformity to His decreed will, He will look at you and say, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

JC Ryle in his book *Holiness* writes, “Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own? On whom can they throw the blame, if they are not sanctified, but themselves? God, who has given them grace and a new heart and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for his praise.” The fear and trembling Paul mentions here must be present in your lives as your work out

your salvation. You must have a sense of the love and glory and grace and power and holiness and majesty of God that makes you long to honor Him and fear to offend Him. You must aspire to please Him, and despise the very thought of dishonoring Him, not because you think He will condemn you, but because you love Him and you know He loves you. Let us consider this mercy as the strongest of all motives for yielding up ourselves as living sacrifices, holy, and acceptable to him, as our reasonable service.

But Paul does not throw us back on our own resources. The power, the strength, the motivation to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling does not come from yourself but comes from God Himself. Let us now turn to consider sanctification worked. Look with me at our passage once again, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God works this aspect of sanctification in you. That is why we confess that sanctification is a work of God’s free grace. Yes, you have a responsibility to work it out, but you are simply working out what the Lord is working in you. Do not believe the lie that if you work hard in relation to your salvation then you contribute your part to it. This is the error of the legalists. Nor should you believe the lie that if God works in you then you do not need to work hard at following Christ. This is the error of the antinomians. Instead let your efforts in working out your own salvation be driven by the fact that it is Jehovah Himself who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

This work of God in your sanctification is a trinitarian work. God the Father is seen in Scripture as being the one who plans your sanctification. If you are becoming like Him in His holiness it is because from eternity it has been the Father’s purpose to make you so. We see this in Ephesians 1:3-4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen

us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” God has chosen you in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blame. And to accomplish this plan He sent His Son to bring it about through the death of the cross. Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:25-27 that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, “That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” In self-giving love He first takes on our nature, then suffers in our place that we may be part of that Church which is presented without spot or wrinkle. And it is in union with Christ that sanctification begins. Romans 6:6-7 says, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.” How absurd it is that you, one who has been freed from the shackles of slavery to sin, would then go back and willingly put on those chains once more.

And then, perhaps the most obvious aspect of sanctification, the Spirit is the one who effectually works this part of of salvation within you. Peters writes that believers are elect “in the sanctification of the Spirit.” The work of setting you apart for God and shaping you into His likeness is particularly that of the Spirit. It is He who works within you, stirring up within you a desire to obey the commands of the Lord, empowering you to overcome sin and live according to His precepts. It is through the inner working of the Spirit that you come to increasingly resemble our glorious Lord. This work of the Spirit is made manifest through the fruit of the Spirit being exhibited in the lives of believers. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance.” These are what ought to be worked out in your life, even as the Lord is the one working in you.

And this sanctification, this being made more and more like Christ, is wrought in you through ordinary means, namely the

ordinary means of grace. It is through these means, and not by some super-added grace as the papists teach, that sanctification is progressed in your life. The Word of God is transformative. It ought to change you. If you read it, or hear it preached, and remain as you have always been, you've not yet grasped its message. God's Word changes hearts and transforms lives. Calvin writes, "It is God that calls us, and offers to us salvation; it is our part to embrace by faith what he gives, and by obedience act suitably to his calling; but we have neither from ourselves. Hence we act only when he has prepared us for acting." You must consider your ways, repent of sin, believe the Gospel, and devote yourselves to God. And you must do so not because you have in you to do it yourself, but in dependence on that aid which God will afford to all who seek him in sincerity and truth. Salvation is by the grace of God alone. Sanctification is by the grace of God alone. This ought to humble us as we seek to be more and more conformed into the image of Christ. Brothers and sisters, as the Lord works sanctification in you, you must work it out in your life.