

Work Out Your Salvation

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Bible Verse: Philippians 2:12-13
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Well, we come this morning to a very important text in the book of Philippians, if you want to join me in Philippians 2. We come to a very practical yet unsearchable reality about Christian living, about spiritual growth, about the nature of your sanctification. Philippians 2:12-13 will be our text this morning and we trust and ask God to bless his word this morning far beyond all that we could ask or anticipate according to the power of his Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:12,

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

This text comes to us after Paul has spoken about the humiliation and the exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that discussion of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ came after his call to the church to act with humility toward one another. And let's just review to get the flow of thought in our minds, let's review the text that leads into our text this morning.

So in Philippians 1:27 he said, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." That's the command and now he's working it out and he's getting more specific and he's illustrating it and then he's bringing application after his illustration. So he says in chapter 2, verse 3,

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

The Christian life, in other words, is not meant to be one of self-preoccupation and inward focus exclusively but there is to be this outward look that is mindful of the body of Christ, that is mindful of those around us, and looking to submit and to subordinate our interests to the service and advance of the interests of those around us.

Look at it there in verse 4, you can't avoid this, "do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." And as we've seen, that is exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ did. He did not protect his personal interests as he dwelt in heaven, but rather he looked out for our interests as he came down from heaven to earth, walked to the cross, as it were, gave his life for the sins of his people, was humiliated in that way, buried and entered into the realm of death for a period of time before God raised him from the dead and exalted him.

Verse 5,

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

God became a man. Christ humbled himself to take on human flesh. That's the point of that passage and verse 8,

8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This great humiliation of Christ, coming down to earth, taking on human flesh, living in poverty, living in obscurity, walking and performing his public ministry in the midst of great and constant opposition and the response of hypocrites all around him so that even his disciples fled in his hour of extremity, Christ humbled himself, the glorious Lord humbled himself to that extent and, as we saw last week,

9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And so in this exaltation of Christ, it's a word that covers multiple aspects of his glory. Christ is resurrected from the dead, he's exalted in that way. Christ ascended into heaven, he was exalted in that way. Christ is at the right hand of God the Father, he is exalted in that way. Christ continuously intercedes for his people at the right hand of God, he is exalted in that way. One day he will return to earth in his Second Coming, he will return in power and glory and he will be exalted in that way. And so there is just this great comprehensive humiliation of Christ that led to his death and burial; since then, there has been this great exaltation of Christ that is going to reverberate throughout all of the ages to come. This is who Christ is, great humiliation, great exaltation, so much so that we must understand that there is no other name under heaven that has been given by which we must be saved. No one comes to the Father except through this humbled and exalted Lord Jesus Christ who calls sinners just like you to find salvation in him. And for those of

us that have received the work of Christ, those of us that the Spirit of God has worked these realities in our heart and we've been born again and now we're alive in Christ and we're walking through our own time on earth so very quickly passing, Paul has words for us here in today's text that tell us what the implications of the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ are for us in our Christian living.

So look at verse 12 here. He says, "So then, my beloved." "So then," connecting his prior discussion about the humility and exaltation of Christ with his exhortation that follows. Christ has done this, so then you do this. You be mindful. You respond in this way. You see, the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ has implications for every believer in every aspect of their life. We don't, you and I, we don't hear these things and walk away unchanged. We don't hear about Christ humbled, Christ exalted, and then just go on living however we want, as though we, you know, as though nothing had happened, as if truth had not exploded on our minds about the greatness of who Christ is and all that he has done for us. You see, there's a lot in my mind that wants to come out all at once. I hate it when that happens. I've only got one tongue and I've got 10 thoughts wanting to come out at the same time, traffic jam. When you and I contemplate our Lord, we have to do so in a way that is receptive to what the implications of that are in our lives. We don't hear about Christ and walk away unchanged. James talks about, the book of James talks about a man who looks in the mirror and walks away having forgotten what he looks like. Well, that's not how it's supposed to be when we contemplate Christ, we are to realize that there are implications for us that we are to obey, that we are to follow, and it's not a kind of legalistic obedience, say, "Oh, I've got to do this now." No. No. No. This is the glad-hearted response that comes in response to having such glory manifested to us through the person of Christ and in the word of God. "So then" tells us that there are consequences for us about the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ and that's what we want to consider here today.

Now notice, notice that as we're talking here, I want you to be sure to see the spirit of the passage and the spirit with which God's word comes to us here today. Paul says in verse 12, he says, "So then," as a consequence, and look at how he addresses his readers and by extension how God addresses us. "So then, my beloved." So then, the object of my affection. So then, you that I care about. Here's what you are to do. This term "beloved," it's a term of affection, even a term of esteem as Paul writes to the Philippian believers and what I want you to see is that Paul loves this church even as he is giving exhortation to them. This is not the stern, remote words of a legalistic instructor wagging a finger, this is a spiritual father putting his arms around those that are looking to him for instruction and say, "Here's how we do it. This is where we go from here." And in that spirit of love and support, Paul gives them the direction that they need to respond rightly to this and it's with that spirit that I try to speak, and I'm no apostle, never have been, never will be, but it's with that same spirit of love that I try to address each of you here this morning knowing that many of you are walking through sorrow, some of it self-inflicted, some of it inflicted upon you, some of it just life kind of stuff happening. We come together and we all to one extent or another feel the bruises and the welts of life upon us, and as God's word approaches us, it gives us this great picture of Christ humbled and exalted, says, "So then," and it speaks to us as "beloved," as those on the objects of

God's saving grace, patience, kindness, goodness, and his great love. God is love and the one who loves has been born of God. And so we realize that this passage comes to us to help us, to encourage us, to strengthen us, and it does so in the same spirit of love that motivated Christ to go to the cross for us, so there's every reason for us to receive the word of God today with a receptive heart, with an eager heart to hear this word that comes to us and shows us the consequences of the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ.

Now as you look at verse 12, there's going to be two main points here this morning. We haven't gotten to that yet; we're just kind of introducing things. Look at it here in verse 12. Paul speaks to this church, he says, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed." "You've followed my instruction in the past," Paul tells them. "I've taught you and you have responded to God's word and I recognize that and I affirm you in that, and in the same spirit that brought about that past compliance, now I want you to carry that past compliance forward and respond to this new instruction that I'm giving to you here as I write to you now.

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence." Paul, remember, was writing from a Roman prison. He was removed geographically from them and so the pattern of communication and carrying a letter and getting things back and responses, you know, it took days, weeks to take place. Paul is removed from them as he writes this but he says, "Don't let my absence diminish your response of obedience to what God would have you do in response to Christ. In fact, you obeyed me when I was with you, now much more while I'm away, much more in my absence I want you to respond," he says to them. "I want you to respond to what I am about to say to you," and he expresses in advance his confidence that they will do exactly that.

Now I have a blessed privilege as I preach this text and I have a blessed privilege as I pastor Truth Community Church, I have the blessed privilege of addressing an audience that has manifested the same kind of response to God's word that the Philippians had. I've seen you respond in obedience and in joy to the word of God over the course of time. I've seen you respond to his word and his life, and it's manifest and the testimony of our church goes out as a result of the joyful obedience of the people to whom I speak. And so it's easy for us today as a church to enter into the spirit of the Philippians as we receive the word here because I'm speaking to a congregation that loves to hear and to obey God's word and what a blessing that is.

And so just as you have obeyed in the past, we have the privilege now of hearing what God would say to us in the midst of our lives as we seek to walk with Christ together and the question is this: how is it that you and I grow in obedience in Christ-likeness in response to the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ? We all need to grow, for all that God has done in our midst and for all that we give thanks to him, each one of us, every one of us corporately, every one of us individually, we've all got room to grow, don't we? There's not a one of us that has arrived at spiritual perfection. There's not a one of us that's not dealing in some manner or another with the remaining corruption in our flesh.

And so we need this word of God to instruct us and to guide us and to direct us. We are not a congregation that is satisfied with what has happened in the past and are content to just leave it there. We realize that we need to press on to know the Lord better, we need to press on to grow in grace, we need to press on and to become more like Christ than what we have attained so far. So we have every reason to hear this with receptive ears because we know that Scripture addresses us in love. We also have every reason to hear this and to respond to it knowing that we have more yet to grow. And so from that dual position of encouragement and need, we come to God's word here and we ask this question: how do we grow in obedience and Christ-likeness as God would have us to do?

Well, there's two aspects of work that are laid out for us in this text. First of all, there's the work by you, the work by you. If we were in Louisiana, that word "by you" would have a whole different sound, wouldn't it? Down by the bayou. No, that's not what we're talking about. The work that you need to do, the personal responsibility you bear in your spiritual growth, that's the first aspect, the work by you; and then secondly, we're going to see the work in you, in the work in you as God works out his purposes in us. So first of all, we're going to see the work by you in verse 12, and the work in you in verse 13. And so while this passage is unsearchable in its depth, the basic truth that Paul is communicating, there is a simplicity to it. We have responsibility and God is working in us and that's what we need to keep in mind.

So let's consider the work that is to be done by you. The work by you. What is it that Paul wants them to do? What is it that he calls them to? Let's look at verse 12 again.

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, [here's the command] work out your salvation with fear and trembling;

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. He says, "You have something to do. You have a responsibility that you are to act upon in response to Christ. Christ didn't do this, Christ didn't save you simply to make you indifferent in spiritual life and to continue in your dead, carnal ways of sin. You are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ," in the language of 2 Peter 3.

Now it would be easy for us to misunderstand what Paul says here, and based on a misunderstanding dismiss the intent of the passage so let me clear up something from a negative perspective before we look at exactly what Paul did mean. When Paul says, "work out your salvation," he is not saying earn your salvation, work for your salvation. That is not what he is saying and we know that clearly from the context of the letter of Philippians itself. This is not a theological convenience that I exercise to avoid the implications of a difficult text, this is simply the clear indication of God's word in its context of what Paul meant. Paul is not telling people to work so that they get a righteousness of their own that God must reward. That's not what he's saying at all.

"How do you know that?" Well, look over at chapter 3, verse 9, in context, we'll get to this text soon enough in a few weeks. Paul says in chapter 3, verse 9, that he wants to be

found in Christ. Here's the key phrase for today, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law." He says, "I do not want a righteousness of my own. That does not reconcile me to God. That is not what I am after. The righteousness," he says, "that I am after, that I am relying on is that which comes through faith in Christ. It is a righteousness that is given to me, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." And so Paul makes plain that we are not relying on our own righteousness for acceptance with God and that's consistent with what he said in a letter that he wrote at about the same time in the book of Ephesians when he said, "it's by grace that you have been saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works lest anyone should boast."

And so, beloved, you must understand briefly, quickly, clearly here that Paul is not telling us to work for our salvation because that would contradict the letter of Philippians, it would contradict the broader context of Scripture. That's not what he's saying here at all but let me emphasize: there is nothing that you can do to earn the pardon of your sins. There is nothing that you can do in your own righteousness to earn acceptance with God. Salvation is a gift of grace that is given to undeserving sinners and the man who thinks he is righteous in himself is a man who is not saved. Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And so the whole premise of biblical salvation is that we come to Christ as broken, guilty, unworthy, undeserving sinners and we receive a grace that we do not deserve and we receive forgiveness as a gift, not as a wage. The wages of sin is death. The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. It's a free gift and it's only received as a gift, okay?

So Paul when he tells them to work out their salvation is saying something different than, he is not saying work for your salvation. The prepositions are important here. What he says, look at the text with me there, put your finger on the word if you want to, he says, "work out your salvation." Work it out. In other words, "God, my Philippian friends, he says to them, God has put His salvation inside you. God has saved you in this humbled and exalted Christ. Now that that has happened, work it out, carry out the implications of that in your life." Stated differently, "Because your salvation is real and is at work in you, express it, act upon it, do something with it that I am about to explain to you," Paul would say.

Let's step back and let's talk theologically for a moment, shall we? We shall. At the initial moment of your salvation, in that theologically rich moment of our conversion, God did multiple things. One of the things that he did was he regenerated you. He imparted new life to you. You were given new life and a new heart to replace your dead and stony, cold heart. That's what regeneration means. God gave new life to you in Christ and he did it in a moment. He did it in an instant. He did it in the twinkling of an eye. And at that moment when that new life prompted you to believe and trust in Christ, God justified you completely, perfectly, permanently, with finality. Justification is a way of saying that God pardons our sins and he accepts us as righteous for the sake of his Son. When you believed, God did those things: he regenerated you without any contribution from your part; he justified you and you played no part in that justification. You were justified on the grounds of the obedience of Christ, not on anything that you had done. Okay?

So regeneration and justification take place among many other things. Today's text shows us, we're speaking theologically here and that's good to do, today's text shows us that that act of regeneration, that sole work of God, that monergistic work of God in your soul to give you new life, regeneration and justification have a result, regeneration and justification lead to sanctification in the life of every true believer. Those things are distinguished theologically, they are distinguished in our experience but they can never be separated from one another. The man who is truly saved will show it by the way that he lives. Faith, James says, without works is dead. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, Ephesians 2:10 says. And so true salvation, regeneration and justification have an inevitable result in that they produce sanctification in the life of the believer.

What is sanctification? Stay with me here. We're not speaking over anybody's head here, we just need to stay on top and swim above the water, okay? These things are all very important to your spiritual life and what God intends for your salvation to produce in you. Sanctification is an ongoing process by which the God who saved us now begins to conform us to the image of Christ. He starts to transform our moral character and there's a lot of work to be done because we're really sinful and corrupt, but God starts a work in salvation by which he conforms us to the image of Christ after we were first saved. And it's a process, it doesn't all happen in a moment. Those of you that are struggling with sin, those of you that feel the weight of your imperfections and, you know, and you feel the conflict between what you ought to be and what you are, what you want to be and what you are, you feel that conflict, this is part of the Christian life, that struggle is part of the process of sanctification that God is working out in our lives, and what Paul is saying here is that now that God has planted – I'm speaking in metaphors here – now that God has planted the perfect seed of salvation in you, you have a responsibility to water that seed so that it will grow. You have a responsibility in your sanctification to pursue spiritual growth so that you will go from being an infant in Christ to gradually growing in a more mature way until you become a mature man or woman in Christ.

Look at Colossians, just the next page over, really, or two in your Bible in Colossians 1:28. If you ever wonder why I do what I do, why any biblical pastor does what he does, here's a summary of it. Chapter 1, verse 28, "We proclaim Him," we proclaim Christ, "admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." When you are born again, you are saved forever, your future in heaven is secure but you are not yet perfected in the image of Christ. You are not yet made like him. You need to grow; from the moment you are born again, you need to grow into this fullness of Christ. And the very fact that Paul is working so that a man might be presented complete indicates that the man is incomplete in his sanctification. Our salvation, our position in Christ, perfect, unchanging, can't be lost. The process of being conformed to the image of Christ, that's where we need to grow and what today's text is reminding us and showing us is this, is that each one of you who are in Christ, each one of you has a responsibility to pursue your spiritual growth. You have a responsibility of obedience, to grow in Christ, to understand the commands of God on your life and to exercise effort in order to obey them.

We don't get saved and then just let go and let God, as though we were just completely passive in the process. I think it's helpful to think about it this way. As you read through the New Testament epistles that are talking about life in Christ and helping us understand the significance of salvation, there are all kinds of commands addressed to believers, aren't there? You know, this is the will of God, your sanctification, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality. You know, in everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ. And those are just illustrations of the commands that God places upon his people and his word. Now here's what you need to understand in terms of thinking about our responsibility to pursue our spiritual growth and understanding that we are not so passive in this that it's all up to God to do it and we have no part to play. There's a lot of people that believe that. It sounds so high-minded and so spiritual to simply say, "I'm going to let go and let God. I'm just going to trust God to do it and I'm going to wait here until he does." That's wrong. That's really really bad thinking and it's not at all what Scripture teaches. Listen, I'm actually going to keep my point, I'm going to build on what I've been saying here. The fact that there are commands in the New Testament ought to tell you something about the responsibility that you and I have to pursue our own spiritual growth. The Bible is not commanding God to do something. It's not commanding God to be thankful. It's not commanding God to avoid sexual immorality, we border on the edge of blasphemy here in order to make our point. It's commanding us. There is responsibility for us to respond in obedience in gratitude to what Christ has done and I make all of these points, I say all of these things to help you understand as a believer you have a responsibility in your spiritual life to pursue spiritual growth, to obey God. It's not to earn your salvation but it's to respond to what God has done in you. Christ is Lord and as Lord he commands and receives our obedience. He said in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say? Why do you verbalize this recognition of My Lordship and yet your life is completely disobedient to it?" He says, "That doesn't work. It's not like that."

And so all of those things simply to help us see that there is a work to be done by you in your Christian life in order for this growth to take place, and how does that work, what is it that we are to pursue, what kind of things do we pursue in order to see that? Well, look over at the book of Acts 2. Rather than jumping straight to the outward moral aspects of Christian living, you and I need to understand that there is a spiritual dynamic, there's a spiritual fire, let's say, I'm speaking in a metaphor again, I'm using a picture, there's a spiritual fire at which we bring our cold hearts and we warm our hearts, we stand and hold our hands against the fire so that it warms us internally so that we start to manifest this obedience. There are spiritual means of grace that we pursue and that we put ourselves under so that this growth can take place.

What was the early church doing? Acts 2:42, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." There is to be this aspect in your life where you are searching out the word of God for yourself. You're reading it, you're studying it, you're hearing it taught so that you can grow in understanding. There is this aspect of Christian fellowship that we're enjoying even today as we gather together corporately, and life on life as iron sharpens

iron our lives condition one another toward the path, that narrow path of sanctification. We come together corporately and we pray corporately as we did earlier, and individually you devote time to prayer. You see, and these are all things that you make effort at, and praise God this morning every one of you that are in this room, you've made an effort to do that, to be here for the fellowship of the saints, the preaching of the word, the corporate prayer that we engage in here. This is the fuel that we add to the tank so that we can motor forward in our spiritual growth. It's a very important aspect of it. And through – here's what I want you to see – through those means, God causes us to grow over time.

Now one of the ongoing desires of my heart in a pulpit ministry is to try to help as much as I can help people distinguish in their minds and outward conformity to these things with the inner reality that we're trying to impart and to teach and to call you to. We're not talking about simply mechanically going to the word to read it and to go through some mechanical praying just to say that you've done it. That cold indifferent spirit is not going to lead to much in the way of sanctification. What we're talking about here as Paul talks about "work out your salvation," look at what he says there at the end of verse 12, he says work it out "with fear and trembling." With fear and trembling, he says in Philippians 2:12. There's a whole spirit in which this is to be done. It's with reverence that we do this. Beloved, it's with desire that we do this. Beloved, it's with love for God that we do this. We understand, we meditate upon the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ and our hearts are transformed by that to love and worship in adoration of this great one who is the object of our faith, the one who saved us. And because we love him, because we see him in his exaltation, we tremble at his feet, we tremble at the majesty of what biblical salvation is and the one who accomplished it on our behalf and we say, "There's nothing for me to do but to submit, to love, to honor, to reverence Christ and to pursue Him with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind." It could be no other way.

I ask you, those of you that are tracking and sympathetic with everything that I'm saying here today, I ask you honestly how could it be any other way? How could you really understand deity becoming humanity, how could you really understand the Son of God bearing your sins in his body at the cross, how could you really understand his death, his resurrection, his ascension, his session at high where he intercedes for his people, his Second Coming yet to occur, how could you really understand those things and not be utterly captivated and have it overturn your life and overturn the entire reason of your existence and overturn all of the affections of your heart so that the things that you once loved in sin and carnality are now abhorrent to you because you have forsaken them for the greater object of loving, pursuing and worshipping Christ? It could be no other way. It could be no other way than to be utterly transforming and a complete reorientation of the purpose of your life and the affections of your heart.

It couldn't be any other way and that's what Paul is getting at when he says "with fear and trembling." This is a phrase that is expressing profound reverence to Christ. His humility and his exaltation humble our souls. "God, there is nothing like this anywhere in the universe. There is nothing like this on earth. This is utterly foreign to who I am." And it humbles us. We're humbled in the presence of such great majesty. And then we are also humbled as we look within and we see this remaining corruption that's within us, the

remnants of rebellion in our Christian hearts, the remnants of bitterness, remnants of lust and greed and earthly priorities, and that humbles us. We say, "I know these things to be true. I see the majesty of Christ and yet I'm still, there's parts of me that are still like that." And that humbles us even more. The presence of Christ humbles us, and think about it this way, listen real carefully to what I'm saying here, and we ourselves humble ourselves. We look at who we really are and it humbles us to realize what we're like still.

And so we're just humbled before Christ and then we remember that he, you know, the reason that we're in Christ is because he loved us and gave himself up for us. He loved us though we were sinners. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. While we were guilty, separated and without hope and without promise in the world, Christ interceded for us, crucified for us, bled for us, suffered for us, and our affections are so overwhelmed by the majesty of divine love for an unworthy sinner like me, you say to yourself, that all of that draws us to a life of loving humble worship of him so that there is nothing more important in life than Christ. That's the kind of fear and trembling that this produces.

And so, and I speak to some of the young people in the audience who I think especially need to hear this today, one of the outworkings of this, one of the consequences of this, of the things that we're talking about is this, is that in light of everything that we've been saying here this morning, we do this, we decisively reject that attitude of cold indifference to the things of Christ. We decisively reject a biting sarcasm that as the tenor of the attitude of our life that acts as though these things aren't all that important, that wants to act like, "I'm not going to get too carried away with these things," and to mock maybe those who display their earnestness before others. You see, you and I, we reject all of that. There's no place for that anywhere in our heart because the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ drive it all out. We so admire that, we so love that, we respect it, we're in awe of it that it drives out the carnality of those cold, sarcastic, indifferent attitudes that young people are especially in danger of, but that us old guys, we're not exempt from it either, are we? And so all of these things, we recognize all of these things and we devote effort to growing in holiness in gratitude for our salvation. We exercise effort in pursuing his word, fellowship, prayer, the breaking of bread. We pursue these things because who Christ is and what he has done compels a response from us. We work out our salvation.

Now in the context of what Paul is saying, the particular way that this works out that we'll look at next week or the week after, he says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." In context, this working out of our salvation means that we turn away from those grumbling attitudes that are so destructive to life in the body of Christ, life in a home, and the flourishing of godly attitudes in your heart. In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Well, let's look at the second aspect of it: the work in you. The work in you. These are pretty lofty things that we've laid out in the first half of our message here. This work by you, these are lofty things, lofty attitudes that, you know, that we aim after. Let me

remind you and bring you to where Paul goes in verse 13. He says you're to do all of this, verse 13, "for," because, you do it for this reason,

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

A Christian is someone in whom God has done a work. Chapter 1, verse 6, you can look over at it with me real quick, Philippians 1:6. Paul in verse 13 is carrying out a theme that he first introduced way back here in verse 6. He said, "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." In other words, if you are a Christian, God started a work in you at your conversion, and because he started it, God is continuing that work until it is brought to full completion at the day of Christ. God didn't save you and then step back in a deistic way and leave you to your own devices. God, bless his holy name, God saved you and now moves forward and continues to work in you in order to achieve the purposes for which he set about for you before the beginning of time. And so Paul in chapter 2, verse 12, has called us to this realm of obedience with fear and trembling, and then in verse 13 he says, "for." He is explaining the call to obedience. "Here's why you obey with fear and trembling, you obey because God is at work in you. The holy God who saved you is continuing to work in your heart."

Now that encourages us and it sobers us. The idea here is that the ongoing work of God in our hearts produces an ongoing response in us. In other words, beloved, you work this way, you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, you do this because there is a hidden reality going on in your heart. God is at work in you. The Spirit of God who indwells you is not in there in a passive way. He is not an idle presence. He is not like a car idling at the curbside waiting for someone to get in, put it into gear and go. The Spirit of God is actively working in us. The Spirit of God renews your will so that you will do God's will. Over time, the Spirit of God in you gives you strength to overcome remaining sin in your life. You see, as you are pursuing these means of grace, as you are meditating on the person and work of Christ, and even this moment as we are contemplating these things from God's word, the Holy Spirit is at work in your heart. The Holy Spirit is at work in our midst conforming, shaping, changing our thoughts and desires to bring them more into line with what God would have them to be. God is doing a work in us.

Look at it, that's what it says there in verse 13. Every word in this clause that I'm about to read you is a single syllable. It's not complicated. "It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Only at the end do you get a two syllable word in it. To will and to work tells us that God is working, the Spirit of God is working to change our desires. He is working to shape our attitudes. The fruit of the Spirit, I quote this repeatedly I know, but the fruit of the work of the Spirit in us is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The Spirit of God is working those kinds of attitudes in the hearts of those that truly believe. That's what the Spirit produces. That's the work of God in you. The Holy Spirit makes us willing to live godly lives.

Now how does this work? Well, you know, we can't fully trace it out. We can't identify, "Well, at 10:46 and 50 seconds the Spirit did this in me." It doesn't work that way. This is an unseen work of the Spirit. But let me just give you a sense of what we're talking about and we see how these things come together. As you and I go to the word of God, as we together sit under the preaching of the word of God, the Spirit of God puts understanding in our minds. He enlightens us and helps us to understand it. He helps us see points in our lives where it applies and makes application in our lives. He enlightens our minds to put it in the right perspective.

The Spirit softens our hearts when we pray. Do you know something about that? Times where you go to God and you're cold and kind of lifeless but you pray and you persevere in prayer and then there's this transformation that starts to take place, whereas before you were a little bit cold, reluctant and all of that, and as you continue to pray there's an energy that comes. Well, the Spirit of God working and softening our hearts and energizing our praying, using our fellowship and our interpersonal interactions to shape our disposition to life and circumstances, the Spirit's using all of those means to do a work in your heart so that you will work and be willing to follow Christ and he changes your character as he does it.

Look, I said, in one sense this is simple, at another sense this is completely unsearchable. We don't see it. We don't feel it, you know, with our physical sense but the fruit of it is shown over time as character is transformed in the life of the believer. And at root, sanctification while we give all of ourselves to it, at root sanctification is ultimately it's all a work of grace. It's all a work of God. There is no element of spiritual growth that you do apart from the Holy Spirit. There is no element of ongoing spiritual change that has occurred as a result solely and exclusively of your own effort. We pursue it but the Spirit must give it life and the Spirit does give us life.

My dear friend, long since in heaven, not that I ever knew him personally, but my dear friend R. B. Kuiper said this and I quote, he says, "This does not mean that sanctification is in part the work of the Holy Spirit and in part the work of man, all of it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Whatever contribution the believer makes to his sanctification, he makes under the control of the Holy Spirit. When he heeds the scriptural exhortations to holy living, he does so by the grace of the Holy Spirit who dwells within him." We are utterly dependent upon the Spirit to produce this in us, and yet we're responsible to pursue it.

Why do we need the Spirit? Why can't we just go out and do this on our own? Beloved, you and I need the work of the Holy Spirit because you and I are too weak on our own. We lack the conviction, we lack the power, we lack the commitment to pursue this. If the Spirit were to withdraw his work, we would collapse like a building that lost its foundation. It would just all come tumbling down like the Twin Towers did on 9/11 if the Spirit withdrew his work. The only reason we stand is because God helps us to stand by his Spirit. Our remaining corruption is too strong, it is too stubborn. We need supernatural help to overcome it. The blessing of this passage, my friends, is that God promises us right there in verse 13 that that's exactly what he's providing for us. God is

continually at work in you so that as an ongoing pattern you will work and will for his good pleasure.

Notice that closing phrase there, "for His good pleasure." God is glorified in your spiritual growth. It pleases him. But you and I for our part, we say, "God, I would never grow. Any fruit that I bear is a result of Your Spirit working within me. To You be all of the glory. I'm just an unworthy servant. I've only done what I should do. If there's fruit, if there's growth, God, You get all of the glory because You're the one that's at work to will and to work within me."

What does all this mean on a practical level as we wrap this up? I hate how fast time goes when I'm in the pulpit. What does all this mean on a practical level? Well, this helps us understand if we're true Christians or not. The true Christian finds the Bible, finds Jesus Christ to be increasingly dear to his heart. Christ was dear to me in the first moment of my conversion but he's a lot more dear to me now X number of years since then. He's dear and yet he becomes more dear. Scripture, the Bible, it's dear but it becomes more dear the longer you go, so much so that we want to shape our lives around them, we want our thoughts to be controlled by these things. On the other hand, on the other hand, on the negative side, you might say, sin loses its appeal over time. The more you grow, the more you hate sin. You're still tempted by it, you may still stumble into it, you may have a season of disobedience but the true Christian looks on that with detestation and says, "I abhor myself. I repent in dust and ashes. That is not what I want. That may be who I am but it's not what I want." Paul said, "The good I wish, I don't do, the bad I do, I don't want it." The heart affections display the reality of this in our lives.

And so, my friends, some of you I especially want to encourage you with this where I know you're at right today, it's not your perfection that this exposes and you can congratulate yourself on your perfection, we don't have any of that, do we, but rather where the reality of the work of God is displayed in your heart, beloved, is in the fact that you prefer repentance to stubborn rebellion, you prefer obedience to sin, you love spiritual growth and it grieves you when you fall short. That's the kind of work that the Spirit of God produces in the heart of those who truly believe.

And so, my friend, it comes down to this: is God at work in you? If so, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. If these realities of which I've spoken are foreign to you, I call you to Christ. I call you to this one who is a friend of sinners. I call on you to cry out to him to have mercy on your guilty sin-shackled soul, and may he get the glory for all that he does in our midst.

Let's pray together.

Father, help us to work out Your salvation, to work out our salvation which we have received from You. Help us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. May the Spirit of God who indwells us glorify Christ in our eyes and in our hearts that Christ would be the highest object of our deepest affections. Work in us, O Spirit of God. Renew

our will so that we would desire and that we would do this spiritual work to the glory of God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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