

Sanctification
SERMON
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TEXT: Philippians 2:12-18

PROP: God's work of sanctification brings about great changes in our life so that we become shining lights in a dark world.

Philippians 2:12-18 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

When we consider those things that distinguish our church from others we will recall the doctrines of grace, Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and the Perseverance of the Saints. These doctrines define the basic differences between Calvinists and Arminians. We may all agree that Jesus is God; that he was born of a virgin; that the Bible is inerrant and infallible; that Jesus rose bodily from the grave and will come again visibly with the same body with which he ascended into heaven. These are known as the fundamentals of the faith but the doctrines of grace are a very substantial part of biblical truth.

In addition we will recall the Covenant of Grace in which God covenants to be a God to us and to our descendants after us. This distinguishes us from those known as dispensationalists. The Covenant of Grace establishes that God's people were saved by grace in all periods of history but dispensationalists maintain that salvation came to people in different ways at different times in history. During Moses day, they say, people were saved by keeping the law but now they are saved by grace.

More recently we have examined the doctrines of Justification and Adoption. As we have seen the doctrine of justification was a central issue of the Reformation. It is precisely here that our differences with Roman Catholicism are focused. Are we saved by works or by faith alone? If not by faith alone then penances, indulgences, purgatory, works of supererogation and such like are needed in order to be saved. If we are saved by faith alone as the Bible teaches, then salvation is all of God. God acts to pardon our sin and to impute the righteousness of Christ to us that we might appear before God as righteous and holy. Those whom he has justified have also been adopted into the great family of God known as the church, the commonwealth of Israel or the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. This too is an act of God by which undeserving sinners are taken into a family to which they do not naturally belong.

All of these things work to bring us profound benefits both in this life and the life to come. Indeed we should thank God and praise him for what he has done for us and we should thank him for the death of Christ upon which all of these benefits depend. Our sins are forgiven because of Christ who as Peter writes,

1 Peter 2:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ “ - bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Now we turn to the doctrine of Sanctification. While justification and adoption are **acts** of God, sanctification is a **work** of God’s Spirit. God declares that our sins are forgiven, he covers us with the righteousness of Christ and he makes us members of the heavenly assembly of the saints. All of this was done by the declaration and command of God, but the sanctification of his people is a lifelong process undertaken by the Holy Spirit for each one of us who are saved by faith.

Sanctification refers to the act of setting something apart for a special purpose. The priests sanctified the vessels of the temple by washing them or by sprinkling water on them. But Paul refers to the sanctification of believers in

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through **sanctification** by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accordingly we are saved by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and by faith in the truth of the gospel. We obtain the glory of Christ not through our own meritorious works but because God chose us for salvation, because God the Spirit sanctifies us, works faith in us, and powerfully calls us to himself.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 (ESV)

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and **sanctification** and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in YAHWEH.”

Here sanctification is juxtaposed with wisdom from God, righteousness and redemption all of which are embodied in our Savior, Christ Jesus. We have none of these attributes by nature but God has caused that each one of his people possess these attributes through Christ. When we are unified with Christ by faith alone, we possess his righteousness, his sanctification and his redemption. And again we see that our salvation is all of God. We can boast of nothing. Our salvation is a gracious gift of God that rules out all human boasting. There is no purgatory here, no lighting of candles, there are no indulgences, no good works which are required to complete our salvation.

Our text in Philippians chapter 2 does not mention sanctification as such but instructs us in certain very significant aspects of this great **process** that brings us into the presence of our great God and Savior for all eternity.

I. Sanctification means that the Holy Spirit is working in us to live in obedience to God’s commands.

Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

The exhortation to work out our own salvation follows from what Paul has been saying about the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, Paul says, was in the form of God the Father and equal to him, yet he set aside his divine prerogatives and humbled himself to the point of death on the cross. Paul notes that Jesus was **obedient** to death and is therefore a preeminent example of the obedience Paul urges upon us. He wants us to have the mind of Christ. He wants us to humbly serve one another in the church and to be like minded.

Jesus was greatly exalted for his obedience. He was given the great covenant name of God, YAHWEH, that all men everywhere should confess that Jesus Christ is YAHWEH God. Because Jesus was rewarded for obedience so shall we be rewarded therefore we need to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling. Furthermore we can expect God to strengthen all those who sincerely trust in him and obey him. All of this we gather from what the apostle has said earlier in this chapter therefore we are to obey the Lord. We are to work out our own salvation and it certainly is hard work to strive against sin. In other words the process of sanctification calls for obedience to the exhortation Paul gives to us to have the mind of Christ.

To work out our own salvation cannot mean that we should save ourselves. We have already seen that salvation is of the Lord. We have been reminded to glory only in the Lord. He goes on to say that God “works in us both to will and to do his good pleasure.” Indeed this is the only reason for our inclination to love the Lord and to obey him. A remarkable change has occurred in our lives so that the preaching of the cross is no longer foolishness to us. The Scriptures are opened to our understanding. We desire the True and Living God. We delight to come to him in the fellowship of prayer. The Holy Spirit has been given to us and it is he who enables us and moves us to a life that increasingly dies to sin and lives unto righteousness. How can there not be a marked change in our whole world and life view. El Shaddai, God Almighty works in each one such that the very intent of our heart is to please our heavenly father.

Working out our own salvation with fear and trembling strongly implies that there is to be a life long struggle with sin but that we shall be eminently successful because God is working in us. **We are not saved by working out our salvation, rather, we work out our own salvation because we have been regenerated, justified and adopted by God.** We work out our own salvation, indeed, we live in obedience to Gods commands in awe and reverence for the powerful Holy Spirit who indwells us.

II. Sanctification means that we are to be shining lights producing mutual joy.

Philippians 2:14-18 (ESV)

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you **shine as lights in the world**, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Regeneration by the Holy Spirit brings **inevitable** results. This work of God in our hearts is never ineffective. When we see little or no change in the quality of obedience to God's commands, when we see little working out of one's salvation we may rightly conclude that the Holy Spirit has not been at work there. Where the Spirit has been pleased to work we see the **inevitable** fruit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Too often we see false fruit or no fruit. Too often we see fruit that is only temporary.

Jonathon Toms wrote the following observations

Odd that you call me bread
but do not feed on me, and water
but do not thirst for me.

Strange when you say I am the way
but do not walk me, and the word
but do not talk me.

Bizarre to be Lord
and not obeyed, to be teacher
when no one will learn.

Bewildering that I am the door
which is not entered and the light
which no one wants turned on.

Grotesque when you call me the truth
without believing me, and the life

without living me.

But you also call me judge.

Where the Holy Spirit has been working to will and to do for his good pleasure the urgings of the apostle will not fall on deaf ears. Complaining and disputing are not consistent at all with regeneration but to the contrary we will hear the apostle when he urges us to humble unity. All of these things mentioned by Paul will be in us and increase, attaining to the mind of Christ, shining as lights in the world and holding fast the word of life.

Jesus said,

Matthew 5:13-16 (ESV)

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. ¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

The Lord Jesus concludes the first part of his Sermon on the Mount with these words. We call this part of his sermon the Beatitudes because he gave nine statements dealing with the blessedness of those who by God’s grace have been converted. Consciousness of sin, humility before God, mercy, pureness of heart, peacemaking and endurance of persecution are realized only by the work of God in the life of his saints. Of these Jesus said “You **are** the light of the world.” Not you *should be* shining lights but you *actually do* give light to all who are around you. No one can be or will be a light in a wicked and perverse generation apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Who but a true saint will hold fast to the word of life? These things are impossible to those who are unconverted.

In addition the work of sanctification does not produce superficial results. There are two kinds of obedience, grudging and voluntary. “On the outside I may be sitting down but on the inside I am still standing up,” said the boy who after repeated admonitions to sit down finally “obeyed” fearing that otherwise he would be punished. This isn’t obedience at all and is not consistent with the working of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the believer. Paul urges us to obedience knowing the

powerful temptations to fall into sin, to mutter and argue about the clear commandments of the Lord.

Let us also notice the result of obedience. Paul will rejoice in the day of Christ that he had not run in vain or labored in vain. And we who obey the Lord will rejoice and be glad with him. How good it is to love the Lord and how we should rejoice in tribulation. As James says,

James 1:2-4 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Albert P. Stauderman wrote, "If I live long enough, I'd like to write a book on trials, because without them a person can know neither Scripture, nor faith, nor can he fear and love God. **If he has never suffered, he cannot understand what hope is.**"

What a wonderful privilege it is to hold fast the word of life. That the gracious Spirit of God should so work in our lives that we love the word of God and proclaim the gospel through word and life to the world about us. Think of the wretchedness of the crooked and perverse generation around us with its bloodshed, its sadness and misery. What marvelous grace that God should give us his Spirit to guide and help us onward to glory. What rejoicing should be ours! Even in the face of trial and persecution we have abundant reason to rejoice in the goodness of God. The work of the Holy Spirit will be eminently successful in bringing us to God. It has been his good pleasure to justify us, to adopt us and to work sanctification in us to the end that we will surely stand whole and complete in the day of redemption.

C.H. Spurgeon in his book *Lectures to my Students* has some wise, but caustic, advice. "Sepulchral tones may fit a man to be an undertaker, but Lazarus is not called out of his grave by hollow moans." "I know brethren who from head to foot, in garb, tone, manner, necktie and boots are so utterly (sanctimonious) that no particle of manhood is visible.... Some men appear to have a white cravat twisted round their souls, their manhood is throttled with that starched rag." "An individual who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living." "I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls; not levity and frothiness, but a genial, happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and there will be more souls led to heaven by a man who wears heaven in his face than by one who bears death in his looks."

God's work of sanctification brings about great changes in our life so that we become shining lights in a dark world. Praise YAHWEH! הַלְלוּ לַיהוָה

Psalm 148:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ Let them praise the name (of the LORD) YAHWEH, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven. ¹⁴ He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise (the LORD) YAHWEH! הַלְלוּ לַיהוָה