

Sanctification—God Is Sovereign, AND, You Are Responsible!

Philippians 2:12-13

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture Reading: Romans 6; Philippians 2:12–13.
- Questions: How are Christians sanctified? What roles do man and God play in the process of sanctification?
- The importance of sanctification: From the moment Christians believe in the Lord until they enter the kingdom of heaven glorified, the whole process in the middle is sanctification. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3); “Pursue ... the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).
- Outlines:
 - Title: Sanctification—God Is Sovereign, AND, You Are Responsible!
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Your Responsibility (v12)

Threefold Motivation—Knowing the Lord, Being Loved, Showing Obedience

- "So then": The following is because of verses 6-11 - Christ was humbled all the way to the end, and was highly exalted by God. Is this your knowledge of Christ? If so, Paul says, it is your responsibility to pursue sanctification, and to do so with fear and trembling, because the knowledge of Christ should fill us with awe!

"My beloved": Paul will challenge them to such a high standard that they are destined to fail, but Paul wants them to know that even when they fail, they are still his "beloved"!

Philippians 1:8 “For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus”

Analogy: A parent who loves a child will also set high standards for him to grow, but at the same time be patient with his failures.

“Just as you have always obeyed”: Not perfect obedience, but basic obedience must be demonstrated, for it is the evidence of true salvation. The gospel is not just good news, it is a command that requires obedience.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 “dealing out retribution to those who ... do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

The word "always" indicates continuous obedience, not on-and-off. A Christian's commitment to obedience must be continuous. Because God Himself is at work in believers (v. 13), it is impossible not to remain committed to the Lord

“not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence”: It's not just obedience in front of people. "Much more" also indicates their growth over the years. Christian obedience is not only continuous, it must also be growing, because God is at work in us, and it is impossible not to grow or to regress.

Your Responsibility—Work Out Your Salvation!

“work out your salvation”: it is not salvation by works (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9). "Salvation" here refers not to the initial salvation when you first believed in the Lord, but the final salvation when your resurrected body goes into heaven and is forever freed from the power and consequences of sin! Salvation in this sense requires the constant effort of Christians to work it out, and we must not slack!

Theological footnote: Whether the initial conversion or the lifelong sanctification, the roles of God and man are essentially the same. Both are 100% God's work that God initiates in man's heart, and both are 100% man's response to what God works in his heart. If it weren't for God's work of regeneration, no one would be able to respond in repentance and faith in the Lord, but you must respond in order to be saved; if it weren't for God's work in the hearts of believers, no one would be able to pursue sanctification according to God's will, but you must pursue in order to be sanctified. Is Salvation God's Sovereignty or Man's Responsibility?
Biblical Answer: Both! God is 100% sovereign and man is 100% responsible.

The Proper Attitude—Fear and Trembling

- "Fear": It's obviously not the servile fear or the fear of hell, but the solemn reverence because you know how great God is and you cannot treat Him lightly. You are not afraid of going to hell, you are afraid of sinning against Him and bringing His name to shame!
- “Trembling”: Everyone knows the kind of trembling out of extreme fear, but how many have trembled out of deep reverence for God?

Psalm 2:11 “Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling.”

Isaiah 66:2 “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

God’s Sovereignty (v13)

- “For”: Man's responsibility is because of God's sovereignty! Why is it your responsibility to pursue sanctification? Answer - because the Triune God is at work in you!

God’s Indwelling

- “It is God who is at work in you”: The emphasis is "it is God"! See 1:6. This is not teaching something new, but taking what they already well known as an argument. So here’s the question for you—

Does this argument apply to you? Do you know with confidence who is at work in you? Unbelievers can also have the appearance of pursuing to do good deeds, so is there any difference between your and their pursuit? Do you have the absolute confidence to say that what is happening in you is completely supernatural, and that there is no way your life can be explained except that the Holy God Himself is at work in you? Do you have such confidence? Or is everything you do fully explainable from a natural, human perspective? Have you ever wondered that maybe your coming to church and doing everything the Bible commands, maybe it's just all your own human efforts? Do you really have God living in you?

God’s Working

“To will and to work”: Notice the subject of these actions is not "you" but "God". It is God who is at work in us. It is God who wills in us. It is God who uses our body to act. It’s all God! All credit goes to God for our sanctified life!

Do you have the slightest credit? No! Are you responsible? Yes! You are 100% responsible for obeying what God works in you, but when you work it out, guess who did it in the end? Not you, but God. It is God who works within you, it is God who wills, it is God who acts, and it is never you!

You say, "Why then am I still responsible for my sanctification? I can't figure it out!" - Well, there you go! Welcome to your own finiteness! Welcome to the unsearchable greatness of God! Welcome to the realization that there are mysteries in God’s will that you can’t fathom, and you can only stand in fear and trembling before Him!

God’s Pleasure

- “for His good pleasure”: What God does in us is ultimately for the fulfillment of His own good pleasure. A sanctified life begins and ends with God. We are just a medium, a medium through

which God Himself works to accomplish His own good pleasure and manifest His own glory. Is such a great, marvelous and unfathomable God worthy of your whole-hearted worship?

The good pleasure of God is not just a cliché used to comfort our heart in times of suffering. It is for us to actively seek and pursue the things that please God!

Romans 12:2 “prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

God’s good pleasure is something we have to prove, seek, and obey. This is our responsibility, but in the end, it is still He who does it, so the credit goes to Him. Isn't that amazing? Is this God worthy of your worship?

Conclusion

- A pastor once said that every time he preaches, he is like a curious audience, watching how God would use his body to work.
- Not just pastors preaching, but it’s also true of our entire lifelong sanctification as Christians, isn't it? As a new creation indwelled by Christ, you can be an audience at any moment, watching God to show you His wonderful work in you!
- You say, "Why can't I see it?"—because you're not doing your part of the job. God has absolute sovereignty, and you have absolute responsibility. If we fail to see God’s work, either we don’t know God’s will well enough, or we are disobedient and unwilling to obey. Let’s ask God to help us!