

Phil. 2:1-8, 12-16

Nov. 15, 2020

Matt. 5: 13-16

Friends, I hope that by now you understand what we mean when we talk of sanctification. Most of us understand that our salvation is in and through Christ's atonement on the Cross; he paid the price for all of our sin; justice was done so we are "justified" before our holy and righteous God. You get that. You understand that you are not a Christian because you are a good person, or a church member, or have memorized Bible verses, or because your father was a preacher and your mother was a Sunday School teacher. You are a Christian because you received salvation through Jesus.

Sanctification, then, is the follow on to our salvation in Christ. It is the continuing process of reforming our nature by letting Christ's character replace our old sinful character. Salvation is accepting Christ's atonement on the cross. Sanctification is accepting Christ into one's life. It's "going on to perfection" as known in Christ.

Now it must be asked: can a "born again Christian" be "still born?" And the answer is: Yes. Simply accepting Christ as Savior but with no subsequent reform of character, is not God's purpose for salvation. ... *It is God's will that you should be sanctified, 1 Thess. 4:3. So that you ... become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, Eph. 4:13. To stop at the threshold of faith is to risk remaining a Christian in name only.*

Three Truths of Sanctification

When Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi he encouraged them to continue on the path of holiness yearning for that character of heart and soul that was found in Christ, ... *who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men, Phil. 2:6-7.* Yearning for the character of Christ to be formed in us is a matter of acting on the truths God has revealed in Christ.

1. Hold fast to the truth that ... it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure, Phil. 2:13.

2. The truth that you must ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, Phil. 2:12.

3. The truth that it is a "both/and" proposition, wherein God is at work in you as you are working.

God At Work

Paul wrote: ... *it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* Here's another way to write it: It is God that of His good pleasure works in you both to will and to do. In other words, God wants to work

in you to enable you to not only obey Him but also to want to obey Him. What an encouragement to know that God wants to work in us, with supernatural power, to breathe into us every good desire (our wills) and bring every good desire to good effect (our actions).

Without God's power our good intentions vanish from lack of action. Before we get into heaven the Holy Spirit is at work getting heaven into us. Deeply knowing this truth makes it easy to "glory in the Lord."¹

The Christian At Work

Paul wrote: *... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* God works in you therefore you *can* work. The original word translated as "work" implies doing a thing thoroughly so that it is completed (κατεργάζεσθε – "bring about"). Paul is reminding Christians to continue seeking more of Christ in their lives, not in a half-hearted way but with full focus. Since I have been put right with God I am now *able* (and free) to turn away from the sinful life and turn toward the life of the Spirit, bearing the fruit of repentance. This is both instantaneous and gradual: from the first moment of rebirth in Christ and in each moment afterward when I turn to God.

To work this out with "fear and trembling" is an expression that emphasizes earnest and honest endeavor, with no cutting corners or slacking, and never quitting until the task is complete. Words such as care, diligence, punctuality, and exactness describe the Christian pursuit of holiness. It is a matter of closely reading Scripture and imitating what the faithful have done to conform to Christ.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments, John 14:15. The Lord does not give me rules, He makes His standard very clear, and if my relationship to Him is that of love I will do what He says without any hesitation. If I hesitate, it is because I love someone or something else in competition with Him. Our Lord never insists on obedience but invites a oneness of spirit with Him. Think of the things you do for those you love. You do things you might not do for others, because you have a special relationship with them. When I obey Christ, I fulfill my spiritual destiny to grow into His likeness.

Partners With God

Some might ask, If it is God that works in us both to will and to do, what need is there of our working at all? Doesn't His working supersede the necessity of our working? If God does all, what is left for us to do? These are the questions of our human way of thinking. *Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?* Romans 11:34.

Firstly, since God works we are therefore able to work. By nature, all people are sick with sin, dead in their trespasses and it is not possible for them to do anything in complete goodness unless God raises them from death.

Lazarus could not rise and come out of the tomb until the Lord called him forth and gave him life. Beware of the mock humility which says, “Oh, I can do nothing” and so stops there, without even naming the grace of God. If you say you can do nothing, then you have no faith. For surely you can do something through Christ strengthening you.

Secondly, since God is at work in you, you must therefore work. If you cease to work out your salvation, God will cease to work in you. God has given us liberty, never forcing us to do what we will not freely choose ourselves. St Augustine (5th cen.) said it this way: “He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves.”²

Consecrating Ourselves

The road of sanctification leads us to consecration. This means dedication of our desires, our ambitions, our possessions, all that we have and all that we are, to God’s purposes. Each year in church we remind ourselves of this very purpose, calling as we do this Sunday “Consecration Sunday.” As a way to encourage ourselves to “work out our salvation” each of us is asked to make a commitment to God’s purposes. We are stewards of God to wisely use all the resources He has given us.

Thrift, industry, honesty, sobriety, generosity are all Christian virtues – going back millennia. These virtues are founded in the twin love of God and neighbor and must be included in our plan for holy living. The belief that Christians are to practice financial discipline and charity has a long history; rooted in the conviction that their possessions come from God and so are to be at His disposal. John Wesley, in his sermon “The Use of Money,”³ observed that wise management of money has not been sufficiently considered by believers. Christians have either dismissed money as a source of evil or ignored its relevance to Christian living and how to employ it to greatest advantage.

Wesley dispels the notion that money is a source of evil – he calls that notion “mere empty rant.”⁴ Look at the Scripture text: *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs,* 1Tim. 6:10. “Let the world be as corrupt as it will, gold or silver is not to blame”. Money, like anything, can be used for good or evil. Christians must use money for good.

Believing that Scripture teaches wise use of money Wesley advised Christians to three things:

1. Gain all you can through honest work and common sense without hurting mind or body and without hurting neighbor or yourself.

2. Save all you can. Do not waste it on idle expenses, pleasures of the flesh, expensive clothing and adornments. “Lay out nothing to gratify the pride of life, to gain the admiration or praise of men.” He further advises not to leave your

money to your children if you believe they will waste it, gratifying their selfish desires, rather than serving God.

3. Give all you can.⁵ If one gains and saves all he can and stops there he has done nothing. *Not* to use money is to effectively throw it away. The wise Christian uses his money to provide food, clothing, and shelter for self, spouse, and children. If there still be surplus, he should give all he can to those in need as though giving to God. Wesley meant giving to God's work through His church and to neighbors in need.

The Christian does not count one penny given to God's purposes as a loss but as an opportunity to glorify the Giver of all things. We can ask ourselves before we make the next purchase for our pleasure or comfort: do I really need this thing? Or can my money better serve God by giving it away?

Our use of our money is one more way we can be working out our salvation. *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,"* Heb. 13:5.

Sanctification's Goal

It is to grow us *... to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share...* 1 Timothy 6:18. God's purpose is not to make us perfect saints but to make us one with Himself. God is working in you for His highest ends until His purpose and humanity's purpose are one. The road of sanctification is not always easy. If God has made your path smooth, walk it with grace. If He has made it rough, filled with obstacles, walk it in company with Him. It is in those rough places that we learn to know God better.

If we focus on our own holiness, thinking the goal is to be paragons of virtue fit for some holiness museum, then we are no longer focused on God. The number one thing in the sanctification life is not sticking to an idea of what a saint should be, but your real and vital relationship to Jesus Christ, and your abandonment to Him in all seasons and circumstances of life.

When we speak of Christian sanctification we mean perfecting our relationship to God, which shows itself amid all the ordinary, mundane, and unnoticed events of human life. The saint's calling is to live in perfect relation to God so that others are drawn to God, not to admire the saint's holiness. God isn't perfecting us to be put on display but to get us into a place where He can use us. It is not Christ for me unless I am determined to have Christ formed in me.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God, 2 Cor. 5:21.

Sermon Take Away

- **Salvation is accepting Christ's atonement on the cross. Sanctification is accepting Christ into one's life.**
- **Without God's power our good intentions vanish from lack of action.**
- **God wants to work in you to enable you to not only obey Him but also to want to obey Him.**

¹ John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," *John Wesley's Sermons, An Anthology*, Outler & Heitzenrater, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 73.

² *Qui fecit nos sine nobis, non salvabit nos sine nobis.*

³ John Wesley, "The Use of Money" (1760), *John Wesley's Sermons, An Anthology*, Outler & Heitzenrater, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 348-357.

⁴ Even ancient philosophers decried money; one exhorting his countrymen, in order to banish all vice at once, to throw all their money into the sea. (Horace, Odes, III.xxiv.47, 49).

⁵ This third direction about money was the hardest one for Methodists to follow. Wesley's personal example was difficult to imitate. He lived a very frugal lifestyle and gave away almost the entirety of his income that he did not use for his spartan lifestyle.