

Sanctification
Men at Work: Every Believer's Part in Sanctification (Part 3)
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A number of years ago, I had the opportunity, when I was at Grace to You, to arrange a trip to Israel, and to be privileged to go on it. And they, at the end of the trip to Israel there was an extension and for those who wanted to go to Italy. And I had the opportunity to tour a great deal of Italy to see Pompeii and Rome and Naples and a number of other cities in Italy, but I was struck as I went through Pompeii and Rome especially that how Roman our culture really is. You know in Pompeii I saw fast food restaurants, there's nothing new under the sun. In Rome I saw what used to be multi-storied covered malls. Men, for 2000 years, other men have felt your pain. I visited the Coliseum, and you know as I stood there in the Coliseum, and I heard the guide recount some of what happened there in this massive structure, I was reminded again of just how Roman our culture is; because both of our cultures could really be described as spectator cultures; massive structures for tens of thousands of people to watch others in various athletic endeavors.

The same is true as I found when I moved to Texas, high school football stadiums that look like professional ones. But what's interesting about spectator cultures is: only a few participate, and the rest of us watch. In fact, football, which I enjoyed very much when I was in high school playing, and I still enjoy watching it. Football has been described as 100,000 people who desperately need exercise watching 22 people who desperately need rest: a spectator culture.

You know over the last few weeks we've been looking at the issue of sanctification, and sadly, many Christians see the pursuit of sanctification as a spectator sport. It's something that they are waiting for God to do to them. They assume that God will do it without any real participation on their parts. God is the one who produces the change, but this is the important issue, He will only produce that change through your effort.

Paul lays down this sort of right balance the right perspective about sanctification in Philippians 2. In two verses he shows both sides of the scale. He shows the human responsibility, our own responsibility, our part if you will in sanctification. And then in the second verse, verse 13, he shows us God's part. Obviously, God's role is the most important, God is the one who produces the change, but we have a responsibility and a

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part as well. These are magnificent verses. You know the deeper I have dug into them the more profound I have found them. I found them to be what Lloyd-Jones called “one of the most perfect summaries of the Christian life to be found anywhere.” And I’m enjoying studying, and I hope you benefit from my study today and the next time that we look at this passage together. Let me read it for you, Philippians 2:12,

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

Now, as I got into this text, I realized that there were one of three approaches. There was one of three approaches I could take to it. Let me tell you what those three approaches are, and then we’ll, we’re going to choose one.

First of all, I could have approached this text from the stand point of the primary application to the Philippians. Paul, in these two verses, is essentially saying this to his Philippian friends. He’s saying I want you to continue to obey God’s Word and to pursue your sanctification whether I’m with you or not. Paul wasn’t absolutely certain, he thought he would be released, but he wasn’t absolutely certain, and he hoped to come them. But he says listen, you don’t need me there to continue pursuing your sanctification. Don’t think for a second that my presence is crucial to your living like a Christian. For God is at work in you.

Now teachers and preachers are important, he’s not downplaying that here. He’s not downplaying his role as their teacher and instructor. But he’s saying, don’t lean too heavily on any individual. God is doing something in you.

Some Christians have what one writer called a slavish dependence on a man. When that man or that person is taken away, and suddenly their active pursuit of sanctification seems to dwindle. You know a respected Christian leader, or a pastor, is found to be in a pattern of sin, and this person just sort of throws up their hands and stops their pursuit of holiness. Or perhaps there’s a gifted wonderful spiritual mentor that you love deeply, and then God chooses to take that person from you, whether they move out of the area or whether they’re taken home to be with the Lord, whether you’re talking about a godly pastor, or a godly parent, a longtime friend, a grandparent who has been a tremendous

influence on you. That person's taken out of the way, and there is a tendency to sort of lag in our enthusiasm for pursuing Christ likeness.

Don't slack off, Paul says, listen, I as an Apostle, may or may not be able to come, but that shouldn't matter. God is still at work in you, God used me greatly. God used that person in your life greatly, but He doesn't have to have them to fulfill His purposes for you. That's the one approach we could take to this passage; that primary application to the Philippians.

The second approach we could take is to look at the theology of the passage, and it's rich in theology. Paul essentially wants us to know that our salvation was a gift we received and that our glorification is a gift we anticipate, but in between those two is sanctification, a gift we cultivate, and he really addresses this whole issue of our responsibility, our effort in sanctification.

The third approach, and the one that I'd like for us to take, is simply looking at these two verses with the practical application regarding the believer's role or part in sanctification. Particularly verse 12; your role, your part in sanctification. Now notice in verse 12 that the main clause in the sentence is, "work out your salvation". As we will see, that is a concise presentation of our responsibility in sanctification. But the other phrases in the sentence that modify that main clause, each of those supporting clauses, fill out our understanding of sanctification. In fact, verse 12 contains what I've called four foundational elements of our role in the process of sanctification; four foundational elements of our role in the process of sanctification. Let's look at them together.

The first element that Paul identifies in this passage is: the motives of sanctification, the motives of sanctification. Notice how he begins verse 12. "So then, my beloved" The Greek word usually translated "so" or "therefore" is here translated "so then". We could translate it "therefore". Paul has just finished, remember if you look back in the context, Paul has just finished this passage dealing with the issue of the deeply theological issue of the kenosis, the relationship of the two natures in Christ which we looked at over several weeks. And now he turns from that theological discussion and immediately his first word is "therefore". I love what James Montgomery Boyce said, he said, "Doctrine always leads to practical Christianity."

You see, for Paul, he didn't think like many contemporary Christians think. Many contemporary Christians think doctrine is useless, in fact even dangerous; it gets in the way of my love for Christ. Paul said no, doctrine the basic teaching of the truth is the foundation from which practical living springs on which it grows. So, he leaves this great theological issue of the kenosis, and he says "therefore". Now this word: therefore" connects us to several biblical reasons to earnestly pursue becoming more like Jesus Christ, several motives for pursuing sanctification.

Let me, let me highlight them for you in this passage, there are a couple here. The motives of sanctification, the first one is to follow Christ's example; to follow Christ's example. Notice in verse 8, the word obey is used of Christ, and in verse 12 it's used of the Philippians. Here's what Paul is saying. He's saying listen, Christ as the Son of God obeyed God during His earthly life. He lived a life of obedience, therefore you Philippians; you Countrysiders should live a life of obedience. If Christ obeyed as the Son of God, if He committed Himself to obeying His Father's Word and will, then how much more important is it for us to obey. We should follow Christ's example that becomes a great motive for sanctification; being like our Lord, living like He lived when He was here on the earth.

There's a second motive that's in this text, not only to follow Christ's example, but also to prepare for Christ's coming; to prepare for Christ's coming. The word "therefore" or "so then" as it's translated, may refer back to the end of verse 10, that every knee will bow, and verse 11, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. It may be referring to that, in other words, Paul may be saying this, listen, it is a reality as sure as anything you know that Christ will return. And it's equally a reality that every one of us will stand before Him. Every person will give an account; therefore, we should live in obedience and pursue sanctification with the reality that He is returning, that He's coming, and we'll stand before Him.

You know I think sometimes we don't take this seriously enough. We tend to think sort of glibly and lightly about the return of Christ. It's true, we won't be judged for our sins, I love the reality that I will never stand before God in judgment for my sins again because He perfectly, finally, completely judged them on the person of Jesus Christ on the cross. That's a wonderful reality. But it's interesting when you look at the return of Christ in the New Testament you will always find that it becomes a motivation to holiness. Look at 1 John 3, 1 John 3, we love verse 1 and verse 2. Listen to what John writes, he says,

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [What a wonderful reality, we're going to be like Jesus Christ in a moment when we see Him when He returns. But notice verse 3,] And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

You see the awareness, the reality that Christ is returning, that we will all stand before Him should be a great motivator to pursue personal holiness.

There's a third motive found in this passage, and it's one that we don't often think of it's to honor those whom God has put over us; to honor those whom God has put over us. Notice Paul says, "So then, my beloved..." Paul often appeals to his relationship with the churches as part of the reason that they should pursue sanctification, part of the reason they should obey. Notice Philippians 1:27, he does it there, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear that you're standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"

He says listen, I want you to obey, I want you to obey because it's right, I want to obey because it honors God, and I want you to obey because it will give me great joy to hear that you are walking in obedience. Paul uses that same argument. He appeals to the relationship throughout his writings, but I think the most profound statement of it is in Hebrews, the writer of the Hebrews in 13. Some believe he Paul wrote this Epistle, personally I think it was Apollos, but that's for a different message. Hebrews 13:17, the writer of Hebrews says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account."

You are to submit yourself to the leadership of the church. That doesn't mean some sort of yes sir to everything the elders say, our authority begins and ends with the Word of God. You're to follow and obey the elders as we obey the Word of God and as we urge you to obey the Word of God; because we're to give an account for your souls. Notice

the end of verse 17, “Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

Part of the motivation for obeying, really the Scripture, is what he’s saying when he says obey your leaders, is that that enables those who serve God on your behalf to do it with joy. That’s what Paul is saying, he says let me let me serve the Lord with joy. The Apostle John says the same thing in the third Epistle that bears his name. The elderly Apostle writes in verse 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” Do it, pursue sanctification to honor those whom God has put over you, to let them serve you with joy.

There are other reasons offered elsewhere in Scripture for pursuing sanctification. I just want to highlight one more of them. Turn to 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 1. This motive is to be like our Father, to be like our Father. Notice verse 14. “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in ignorance.”

Now you have to get the picture of what’s going on here. Peter is playing off the principle that we use we grew up in someone else’s home. We grew up with other influences; we grew up with an evil heart as it were. And we were had these cravings we had ignorance, but now we have been graciously adopted. We have been adopted by God, we find ourselves in a new home. And he says as obedient children do not be conformed to what used to be true of your life, verse 15,

but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all *your* behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

That’s a phrase taken from the Old Testament Law, it’s used dozens of times as God gives out His Law, and He tells His people, listen I want you to be separate because I’m separate. I want you to be separate from sin because I’m separate from sin. Peter here is saying listen, “you’ve been adopted into God’s family be like Him, pursue sanctification, to imitate Him.” You know many children who grow up in Godly homes desire to imitate their parents. The most graphic picture of that we’ve all seen and heard is the father walking down the beach and leaving footprints and the child desperately seeking to place his foot in each step. That’s how we should be with God, our adoptive Father, desiring to imitate Him. So, we should pursue sanctification for that reason.

Now those are only a few of the biblical motives that should compel us to pursue likeness to Christ; motives for sanctification. But that brings us to the second element of sanctification that this passage highlights in Philippians 2, and I'll call it the pattern of sanctification: the pattern. Notice what he says, "... just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence...."

The Greek word for obey is used in a variety of contexts. In Matthew 8:27, the winds and the seas obey Christ. In Mark 1:27, the demons obey Christ. In Ephesians 6:1 it says children obey your parents. Same word, in Ephesians 6:5 it says, slaves obey your masters, the same Greek word. It's also interesting as I trace this word through the New Testament this word is often used of believers' initial response to the Gospel. Turn to Acts 6, Acts 6 you see in the early church in Jerusalem this expression was used, Acts 6:7. It says, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."

It's a very interesting expression isn't it? They were becoming obedient to the faith that means they were becoming Christians, they were becoming believers. You see the same thing in 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 1:7 Paul writes,

... the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God. [And then he further explains what it means not to know God,] and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's an interesting expression. They don't obey the gospel. When you look at "the life of the early church in Philippi you see this sort of obedient response to the Scripture. Turn for a moment to the beginning of the church in Acts 16. In Acts 16 we meet the original members of the church in Philippi you see this same response in them, verse 14, "the first one was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshipper of God, she was listening, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

You see two things going on here, you see the Lord at work in her heart to open it to hear and to understand and to believe and you see her responding to the Word. As Acts 6 says, she was becoming obedient to the faith.

Now why does it say that why is this expression obedient to the faith, obeying the gospel why is that used? Well you may never have thought of this before, but the gospel is a command. Do you know what Christ's first message was? His very first message, it's recorded for us in Mark 1:15, short and to the point. "Repent and believe."

Repent and believe, those are imperatives, they're a command. Do this. You may never, you may never have thought of this before, but in addition to being an invitation, and it is a wonderful invitation the gospel. Christ says, "Come unto Me all you that labor or are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Come, drink of the water of life freely, come eat of the bread of life." It's a it's a gracious, wonderful invitation, but the gospel is also a command, repent and believe. Perhaps you have never taken that command seriously. Second Thessalonians 1 tells you that there's coming a day when Christ will return, and He will deal out retribution on those who have not chosen to obey that command.

The Philippians, though, they initially obeyed the gospel. They became obedient to the faith. But Paul is saying more than that, notice he says you have always obeyed. He's not talking just about the initial act of responding to the gospel in faith and repentance at the moment of salvation. But he's talking about an ongoing pattern of obedience. He says, listen, when I've been with you, I've noticed that you have this pattern of listening and obeying what I say. But he adds, not in my presence only, in other words, not just when I show up, but I want you to keep at it even if I'm absent. This has been a pattern in your life, he says. There was this clear, although I'm sure imperfect, pattern of obedience in the spiritual lives of the Philippians. We could put it this way, obedience was not the perfection of their lives, but it was the direction of their lives, and the same should be true of each of us as well: a pattern of sanctification. For true believers there will be a pattern, a consistency in pursuing sanctification.

But Paul adds that we should work out our salvation, notice verse 12 again with fear and trembling. That identifies the next element of sanctification; we'll call it the attitude of sanctification, the attitude of sanctification with fear and trembling. These two words occur together a number of times in the Scripture. In fact, they occur together here in Acts 16, where I had you a moment ago, at the founding of the church at Philippi. Notice verse 25, you know the story, you learned it in flannel graph when you were still in children's Sunday school.

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and (listening) and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened.

Listen this was a life changing experience for these people. They never forgot this encounter. They never forgot this experience. Living in Texas you may not really understand and appreciate how traumatic an earthquake can be, we endured the '94 earthquake in Los Angeles, and let me tell you it is a moment, it seemed like 5 minutes, but it was a little less than a minute that we will never ever forget. You know there's something terribly frightening about the fact that the earth the one thing on which you depend for stability, terra firma becomes anything but. It's frightening. They had a very frightening experience, but notice there was something more frightening about all of this. Verse 27,

When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, "Don't harm yourself, for we are all here!" And the jailer called for lights and rushed in [Watch this] and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas.

Same two words, you know it's interesting in a sense the church in Philippi was born in fear and trembling. And Paul says I want you to continue, I want you to take that experience that left you absolutely terrified, and that is the way the attitude with which I want you to pursue your sanctification.

In 1 Corinthians 2:3, Paul says he preached to the Corinthians in fear and trembling, he preached Christ to them with fear and trembling. In 2 Corinthians 7:15, Paul says the Corinthians received Titus with fear and trembling. Turn to Ephesians because I think we see this attitude worked out in Ephesians 6. You kind of see it fleshed out a little bit, Ephesians 6:5. He's referencing obviously slaves in the first century and he says,

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of

eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

There's a picture of how we are to obey, as first century slaves were to do what they did from their hearts with fear and trembling, we are to pursue fear and sanctification with that same attitude and spirit. In Hebrews 12:21, those two words occur together again. It's used of Moses, and I've described this scene for you a number of times. Moses, on Mount Sinai, when the earthquake was shaking the mountain and there was smoke descending and ascending and there was this loud blasting trumpet and God Himself spoke, Moses says, "I was filled with fear and trembling." That's the picture of how we are to pursue sanctification.

Together these two words picture a person standing with quivering, trembling awe before the person of God. It's not a fear of eternal punishment, that's done with. Instead, it is a consciousness of the Holy presence of Almighty God. It's what the Reformers called *coram Deo*, before the face of God. It's an awareness that you and I live our lives as it were before the very face of our Creator; with fear and trembling. If every created being in the universe will some day pay homage to God, then we need to get on with obeying as those who have a proper awe and respect for God.

I purposely paused my reading of 1 Peter earlier where I did. I want you to turn back to 1 Peter 1. First Peter 1, we looked at verses 14 - 16 where he talks about the fact that we have a new Father, We've been adopted, and we're to live like our Father, but notice what he says in verse 17. "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work," [He says now listen, if you call the One who judges, the One who judges without partiality, if you call that person Father, and if you're a Christian you do, then here's how I want you to respond.] "conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*."

Like many of you this past week, I spent some time in front of the television watching the funeral of President Reagan. There were a lot of thoughts that went through my mind as I'm sure went through yours as I watched the ceremony, one of them was, it's true something good can come out of California. But I was struck with the eloquence of some of the eulogies; particularly Margaret Thatcher. Hers was very profound, but as she went through the eulogy, she said something, she quoted Ronald Reagan in a couple of places. And what she said literally made me shudder. In her presence President Reagan had

referred to God as “the big fellow upstairs”. You know that is utterly lacking in the attitude of fear and trembling that this passage encourages upon us. In fact, let me let me show it to you in graphic terms, turn to Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12:28, the writer of Hebrews says,

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, [In other words since we’re a part of God’s eternal kingdom,] let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service [We’re to serve God in a way that’s acceptable to Him, we’re to express our gratitude and we’re to do it, watch this,] with reverence and awe. [Why believers, why are we to live that way? Well notice the next verse,] (because) for our God is a consuming fire. What a powerful picture of God.

My family received this sort of up close and personal illustration of this reality last Tuesday. You remember that was the night that those three super cell thunderstorms combined out over the west and swept across the metroplex. You heard the thunder; you saw the lightening; you experienced the winds. It was a violent storm, but after it passed things were beginning to calm down. I was putting some things away, and we had just gotten the family settled into bed. All of a sudden there was a stray stroke of lightening. You know one of those where the flash comes at the exact moment you hear this deafening thunder. You know that it’s very close. I grew up in Mobile and grew up in thunder storms, and I remember thinking immediately somebody very close to us lost a tree just now.

We went on about our business and about ten minutes later we heard a siren, and my wife said you know I think that’s on our street. And she poked her head out the door, and sure enough we watched one of our neighbors wave the police to her house followed in just a couple of minutes by fire trucks, and we looked up on the roof, and flames were just consuming the roof. And I stood there with our neighbor, and watched his house burn. I was reminded of this picture. Our God is a consuming fire. Not one to be trifled with or taken lightly. He is to be dealt with fear and trembling, He’s God. We are to pursue our sanctification with this attitude.

So, we’ve seen the motives of sanctification, the pattern of sanctification, the attitude of sanctification.

Finally let's examine our part in sanctification, our part in sanctification. It's back to the main clause of the sentence. Work out your salvation; work out your salvation. Now before we look at what it means, I need to make sure you understand what it doesn't mean. Very important with this phrase, it's been misunderstood in a variety of denominations throughout the history of the church. It doesn't mean that you are to work for your own salvation. How do I know that, well there are several reasons, first of all the rest of Scripture? Even verse 28 of chapter 1 of Philippians tells us that salvation is from God, it's something God gives. In chapter 3 of Philippians, verse 9, Paul says, I've learned that I'm "going to be found in Christ not with a righteousness of my own derived from keeping the law." [Not something I do, or earn,] "but that which is through faith alone, in Christ [alone]" [This gift of righteousness, this gift of a right standing with God] "which ... *comes* from God on the basis of faith"

You see it in Romans 3, this same message that by my own activity I can do nothing to please God.

Now we know that whatever the Law says, [Romans 3:19,] it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed [Listen the Law was given to shut us up,] and that all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law [simply] *comes* the knowledge that we are sinful."

So, it's not about working for our salvation. In fact notice, he says they are already beloved, notice that in verse 12. That phrase "beloved" it's used 80 times in the New Testament; it's always used either of Christ or of true believers. They are already believers; they're not working for their salvation. And the clear meaning of the sentence, notice it doesn't say work for; he could have chosen that Greek word. But it says work out, actually work out is one Greek word, and we'll get to that word in a moment. You can only work out what's already there.

When you look at this word salvation, that's the confusing point for many people; work out your salvation. When you look at this word salvation, the word group salvation, or saved it simply means to rescue or to be rescued. It's used in Scripture to refer both to the moment of conversion as well as the entire sweep of God's redemptive work in your life. In fact, the word "saved" is used of the past. In Ephesians 2:5, it says, "By grace

you have been saved.” Have been saved in a moment in the past. That describes deliverance from the guilt and the penalty of sin. Saved is also used to describe the reality of the present. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 it says, “to us who are being saved.” This describes our ongoing deliverance from the power and the practice of sin. And then it’s also used of the future, Romans 13:11, “now ... is [our] salvation nearer than when we believed.” It’s still out there, but it’s nearer than when we believed.

First Peter 1:5, “we are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.” Our salvation is still in the future. In this sense he means that some day God will deliver us from the future display of His own wrath and from the very presence of our sin.

So, when we talk about being saved it can be used in any one of those senses, either at that moment of salvation, the ongoing process of being delivered from the power of our sin, or of what is coming in the future when we’ll be saved from, rescued from God’s wrath. Here in Philippians 2, he’s talking about the present tense; that ongoing deliverance from the power and practice of sin. So, he’s not saying work for your salvation. He’s also not saying work secondly work to finish acquiring your salvation. Don’t work for your salvation and don’t secondly work to finish acquiring your salvation.

You know some people have the idea that we’ve done something, and God does the rest. They see God’s standard as 100% righteousness, but there’re a couple of skewed views. One sees God as lowering the standard, as sort of accepting less than 100% righteousness, well okay you’ve only got 62%, I’ll accept that. You know it’s as if God grades on a curve. Maybe your teachers did or do, but God doesn’t grade on a curve.

Another skewed view says, well no, God doesn’t lower the standard, it’s still a 100%, but He’ll just take whatever you can give, maybe it’s 30%, and then He’ll make up the other 70%. Do you know what the Biblical view is? You and I contribute 0%. We don’t work to complete what God has begun. We contribute 0% to our salvation. In fact, our best efforts, the Scripture teaches don’t take us closer to God, but they take us into negative territory.

Paul doesn’t mean when he says work out your salvation, that you are to work for your salvation, or you’re to work to finish acquiring your salvation, nor does he mean that God saved you, but now your sanctification depends entirely on you. Verse 13, says God is at

work in you, to will and to do of His good pleasure. Rather what Paul says is this, work out your own salvation or sanctification precisely because God is at work in you. We'll look more at God's part in sanctification when we get to verse 13.

But what does this mean, to work out your salvation. The Greek word translated "work out", literally means "to work at, to work at accomplishing something". We get a little insight about this word from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. It's used in Deuteronomy 28:39 in a very interesting way. It says we're to "cultivate" vineyards, it's used of the people of Israel it says they were to "cultivate" vineyards. The word "cultivate" is the word "work out". It was used in a similar way in secular Greek to describe cultivating a plot of ground.

I had the opportunity a few years ago as I hope to have next year to go to Samara Russia, to teach a group of pastors how to open and teach and preach God's word. I remember as I was driving into the city of Samara, it's the second largest city in Russia, and it was kind of a capitol. I shouldn't say it was the second largest; it was the second capitol to for Stalin. He actually created this major bunker there. I actually got to go to his bunker. Its 12 stories underground and sit in his chair, his original chair is still there. And unlike here where they rope everything off, you get to really experience it there.

And but I remember as I was driving into the city of Samara, I noticed all of these little fields divided into the small plots, and all of them were growing vegetables, and I asked what it was about. And my host said well all the people were forced during Communism to live in the Stalin blocks, these huge apartment buildings grouped close together, and they were given by the government these tiny little plots of land that they could farm. They could raise their own vegetables and fruit and so forth. And so, they'd go leave the city, and they'd go out and cultivate those plots of ground.

That's the picture behind this word work out, it's "to cultivate". To cultivate a small plot of ground, it's a great illustration of sanctification. Some of you have gardens or you have flower beds, when you cultivate a garden, you expend great effort and without your effort the garden will produce no fruit, no vegetables, but when the plants grow, you can't take any real credit for what happens. Because God implanted life in the seed, God put nutrients in the soil, God created the process of sowing and harvesting, God created the seasons of seed time and harvest, God brings the rain and He brings out the sun, and God actually causes it to grow. Same thing is true of sanctification. We're responsible to

cultivate and as we do the feeble things we can, God produces genuine spiritual growth. What a great picture of sanctification.

Paul adds in verse 12, “work out your salvation”. It’s a simple possessive, it means each one of us is responsible to work out our own, you see there’s a danger of being swept along by the spirituality of others. I can tell you as a pastor and someone who’s been in Christian ministry for 17 years, that it’s easy to sort of just be carried along by the spiritual life of others around you. You can be busy. You can be involved in ministry, but you can be carried along by someone else’s pursuit of sanctification. And Paul says no, every one of you is responsible to cultivate sanctification. So, Paul says, listen, I want you to take a look at your own life, are you more like Jesus Christ than you were last month? You may be busy in ministry, but are you more like Jesus than you were last year, 10 years ago?

He says with the right motives and with a constant awareness that we live our lives before the face of God, we are to do two things. We’re to sow the soil of our heart with the Word of God, and then we are to cultivate that seed with constant and a consistent attempts to obey what we learn. That’s work out your own salvation. It’s to sow the seed of God’s Word in the heart, and it’s to cultivate that seed with a consistent pursuit of obeying what we learn. And this working out or working at our sanctification is not for pansies; it’s for it calls for extreme effort.

Notice Philippians 3, I love this image Paul uses. Philippians 3:12, he uses the picture of a runner. Picture the pursuit of Christ likeness, he says verse 12,

Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on ...” [This word was often used in the first century world of a sprinter. I was always slow, a plodder, never a sprinter. Some of you though, you understand what it means to have a very short distance and to strain every muscle of your being to reach that short goal in a short period of time. That’s the picture behind this word press on. He says,] ... I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ.... [In other words, this is what Christ saved me for, this is what He intended.] Verse 13, Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing *I do*; forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.

What's the one thing he does, it's not whatever one thing you want to make it. You know I've heard this message preached you know you need to get one thing that's going to dominate your life. That isn't what Paul's saying. Here's the one thing that pressed him, verse 14, "I sprint toward the goal" What's the goal? The goal is Christ likeness. That's the goal of this life, we're pursuing Christ likeness, but what's wonderful is, not only is it the goal, but it's also the prize. We never arrive in this life, but ultimately, we get the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It requires strenuous effort. We have to cultivate our souls.

You know Sheila and I learned a valuable lesson this spring. As you know, we moved here in the fall, and about October, and everything was kind of slowing down. All of the yard work was slowing down, and we watched through the winter as our neighbors feverishly hacked back their landscaping and mulched their flower beds. We on the other hand enjoyed our winter. We gently trimmed a few branches here and there and watched while our neighbors took machetes and chain saws to everything in sight, wondering what that was about.

And then spring came, and I woke up one morning, and it was like there had been this explosion of green in my yard. It started taking over; vines grew feet in a single day. Weeds took over the flower beds; Alfred Hitchcock could have made a sequel to his movie *The Birds* in my yard and called it, "The Shrubs". If you have a yard in Texas, you know exactly what I mean. It must be cultivated; the same is true of our souls.

Let me ask you. Do you spend more time each week, seeing to the cult either cultivating or seeing to the cultivation of your yard than you do your soul? Paul says work out, cultivate your sanctification. Paul says we can't just sit back and wait for God to act; we must work at our sanctification. We must carefully cultivate our hearts, and as we do so God will produce genuine lasting change in our hearts.

I'm going to be gone for a short time on vacation, and when I return, I hope to look in more detail at the actual process. What does that process of cultivation look like? There's a passage in the New Testament that lays it out in clear detail, and we'll look at it, Lord willing, together when I return.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word, thank You for its truth, its clarity.

Lord, forgive us for being passive where You've commanded us to be active. I pray that You would help us with the right motives to be consistent in our pursuit of sanctification. Lord, help us to pursue sanctification with a healthy fear and trembling before You who are a consuming fire. And Lord, I pray that You would help us to give ourselves to sowing our hearts, to sowing the soil of our hearts with the seed of Your Word and then carefully cultivating that seed by attempts at obedience.

Lord, thank You that as we extend the effort, as we strain, as it were, toward the finish line of Christ likeness, always disappointed with our own progress, but as we strain, You will do what's truly amazing in Your grace. You will produce the change. God make us like Christ.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.