

God at Work: The Divine Role in Sanctification

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Someone this morning asked me how I'm enjoying the Texas summer. All I had to do is explain that I grew up in Mobile, Alabama and lived north of L. A. at 1200 feet above sea level at what was called the high desert. Last year we had a month over 100 degrees every day. For them to understand that so far, so good. But as we get into the dog days of summer, there are a lot of things we do to sort of get through them. One thing a lot of people enjoy is an old American pastime, and that's baseball. If you're familiar with baseball at all, you've heard the name Yogi Berra. Yogi Berra was known for two things: one for his successful, very successful baseball career with the New York Yankees, and secondly, his unique ability to produce a constant string of misquotes and malaprops. His family has taken all of those misquotes and misstatements and put them into a book that's entitled with one of those missayings of his. The book is called *I Didn't Really Say Everything I Said*. Here are a few of my favorites from the book.

You're familiar with "It's déjà vu all over again", "It ain't over till it's over." But here are a few you may not have heard. "Never answer an anonymous letter." It's good advice. "I usually take a two-hour nap from 1:00 – 4:00." "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." "You can observe a lot by watching." Somebody asked him one time what time it was, and he said, "You mean now?" "If the world were perfect, it wouldn't be." "If the people don't want to come out to the ballpark, nobody's going to stop them." On why the New York Yankees lost the 1960 series to Pittsburgh, he said, "We made too many wrong mistakes." As opposed to the right ones. But my favorite is, "The future ain't what it used to be."

You know, some of those statements obviously contradict each other. They're just nonsense. But they're funny, taken in that context. What isn't funny is that the kind of nonsense that's in those statements is now becoming accepted as rational in our culture. Our culture is constantly beginning to accept (be less bothered by) blatant contradiction and irrationality. As a recent example for me, I was watching the Larry King program, and I heard the mayor of San Francisco, who is endorsing and promoting the same-sex marriages there in San Francisco (which is a clear violation of laws that are on the books) say on national television that by doing that, he was really upholding the law. It makes as much sense as some of the things that Yogi Berra said. It's irrational. That makes absolutely no sense, and yet in our culture, it's accepted as perfectly sensible.

But the saddest thing is that blatant contradiction is no longer bothering Christians when it comes to their doctrine, when it comes to their faith. In their mental laziness, Christians are content to

label things they can't understand without some effort and work as a paradox. It's just a contradiction.

Now, don't get me wrong. There are biblical concepts that we can't fully understand. We may never understand them in this life. For example, you and I cannot and do not understand how God made something from nothing. When we create, we take something, and from that something we make something, but God took nothing and made something from it. We'll never understand that. But concepts like that are mysteries. They are not contradictions. The best response when we come across something in scripture that we don't understand, something that seems to contradict itself or contradict something else is to admit that we don't understand it, to work hard to try to understand it, but above all, to argue that the Bible is rational in what it says. It is logical. It does not have any actual contradictions. Our God is a rational God. He has given us the powers of reason as a gift from Him, and His truth is not contradictory. So, our job is to seek to understand in the presence of those things we can't understand, to bow in adoration, but never to call them contradictory, never to assume that they are, in fact, logical contradictions. To do so is to really blaspheme the character of God.

Now, this concept of understanding that we don't understand some things, but everything else that appears on the surface to be contradict can, in fact, be worked out and understood, that's important when we come to Philippians 2:12 and 13. Because often when people come to this text, they see an apparent contradiction. If you look at verse 12, it seems to say that sanctification is entirely the result of our efforts. And then, when you get to verse 13, it seems to say exactly the opposite, that our sanctification is entirely the result of God's efforts. However, there is a clear, rational, reasonable explanation of how these two fit together. You see, verses 12 and 13 are not a contradiction; they are complementary.

The last four messages we've stepped back, and we've examined every believer's role in sanctification. We've looked at what our responsibility is in pursuing Christ-likeness. Last week, we looked at the actual process of working out our salvation. Now, I don't usually promote my tapes, but I do encourage you, if you missed any one of the five messages, (four so far, in this series, you're not missing today, I guess, so you don't need to get today's.) But any of the four before that you've missed, I encourage you to get those and listen to them or go on the Internet and listen, because it's a package you have to understand. Nothing is more crucial to your spiritual life and development than understanding how God brings you to Christ-likeness. Last week, we looked, as I said, at the actual process. We looked at Ephesians 4. Basically, the

process of sanctification is contained in three Greek infinitives in Ephesians 4. One of them is translated “lay aside” or “put off”.

Paul says listen, when you came to Christ, it’s as if you were crucified with Christ, who you used to be died. Now put off or lay aside the clothes that go with who you used to be. Stop acting and thinking like the person you used to be. Lay aside those thoughts and those actions that don’t honor Christ. The second infinitive in that process, not only lay aside, but secondly “Be renewed”. Be renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Be renewed is passive – that means the Holy Spirit is doing it to us, at the same time, it’s a command. You be renewed. That means we can either hinder or promote the process. How are we renewed, and what does it mean to be renewed? Well, he goes on to say, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, literally in the disposition, the outlook of your mind. In other words, let your mind have a paradigm shift. Let the Holy Spirit shift how you think about everything, how you think about yourself, how you think about God, how you think about sin, how you think about holiness. Let your mind be completely renovated by the truth of God. That happens as we come and study and meditate on the Scriptures.

So, those three infinitives, “lay aside or put off”, “be renewed in the spirit of your mind”, and thirdly, “put on”. You see, our job is to find out what sins are in our lives, and put those off through the help of the spirit, to have our thinking changed about that sin, about God, and about the opposite virtue that we should put on, and then to actually step over here and begin to put on that virtue. To do it. To do everything we can to pursue putting on that virtue, acting in that way. That’s the process.

Now, today, we’re going to move from all that we talked about the last four weeks about our responsibility to looking and examining the divine role in sanctification, and I trust you will find this to be as much of an encouragement as I have. We’ve said a lot and looked a lot (as we should) at what our role is and what we should be doing. We felt the weight, if you will, of that burden on our shoulders, but we don’t have to bear it alone.

Let’s look at the divine role. Now we’ve already established that we expend the effort, and God produces the change, but the question is, how does God change us? What exactly does God do to us? Well, Paul explains that in Philippians 2:13. Let me read the two verses to give you context. Verse 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.

It is absolutely amazing to me, as I come to the Word of God each week -- and it's my joy and delight to spend, oh, I don't know, some 25 or 30 hours a week, studying God's Word. It's my joy to seek down the depths of these texts and find more there than I ever imagined was in God's Word. But that's the mind and genius of the Holy Spirit. This verse is absolutely packed with truth we need to understand about God's work in us to make us like Christ. In fact, Paul wants us to grasp in this short verse five important features about God's role in our sanctification. He wants you, before you leave this morning, to understand five important features about what God does in us to make us holy.

The first feature, we'll say this: we need to understand the energy at work in us. Understand the energy at work in us. You see that expression, *It is God who is at work*. Literally, the Greek text says, the one working is God. We were introduced to this whole concept back in Chapter 1:6 where Paul wrote, "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you [that's referring to God's work when He called you to Himself, when He brought you to repentance and faith – that same God ... will perfect ... [that work He began in you when it comes to the return of Jesus Christ.] But the good news is that the God who began a good work in you, and the God who will complete it when Christ returns or when you die, that same God is at work in you today.*

I don't know about you, but that's a great comfort for me. That's a great assurance to me, because I find myself often discouraged and disappointed by the sin and corruption that's still in my heart. Don't despair. The one working in you is none other than the one living and true God who began the work in you, and who will complete it when Christ returns, and He's at work in you today. He created you. He chose you in eternity past. He began a work in you when He made you alive in Christ and gave you the gift of repentance and faith, and when Christ returns or the moment you die, He will perfect that work by making you absolutely perfect, and then, of course, when He returns, He'll give you a perfect body to match that soul. He is at work. Now, notice the present tense. It says, He is working. This is His constant activity. You know, God doesn't need to take weekends off. He doesn't take vacation.

In fact, one of the most comforting things to me in all of Scripture is the reality that God doesn't sleep. I love the passage we read this morning, Isaiah 40:28, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become

weary or tired.” Psalm 121:1, excuse me, 121:4 says, “He who keeps Israel Will neither slumber nor sleep.” God doesn’t need a break. He’s constantly working, 24/7, 365 days a year. There is the energy of God at work in you.

Now, the Greek word for “work” is a very interesting word. It’s the word “energeto”. You recognize an English word that comes from it? We get our English word “energy” from this word. It refers to work that is effective, work that is powerful, work that accomplishes the end result. One commentator calls it effective empowering. It’s usually used to refer as it is here to the powerful work of God. For example, in Ephesians 1:11, it says God works all things after the counsel of His own will. And you know, it’s absolutely crucial for God to be involved in this process of sanctification, because you and I (listen carefully to this), you and I can no more effect our sanctification than we could our justification.

Listen to Paul in Galations 3:3, he says, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit [in other words, having been justified by the work of the Spirit, regenerated by the work of the Spirit] are you now being perfected by the flesh?” We don’t have the capacity to change ourselves in sanctification any more than we have the capacity to declare ourselves righteous before God, or to renovate our hearts, regenerate our hearts. Even the Apostle Paul admits this in Romans 7:18 of himself, he says I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh, for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. That’s why he says in 2 Corinthians 3:5, we’re not adequate in ourselves. Our adequacy is from where? It’s from God. It’s from God.

You see, you and I rely, we have to rely and depend on God’s power not only to save us, but also to sanctify us, to make us like Jesus Christ. This is found in a number of passages in the New Testament. Let me show you a couple that speak to it powerfully. Ephesians 1, Ephesians 1, written at the same time as this epistle to the Philippians, this letter to the Philippians. He says in verse 18,

[I’m praying something for you. I’m praying] ... *that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know [verse 19, here’s something I want you to know. I want you to know] the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. [This power is] ... in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of the heavenly *places*.

You know what he's saying? He's saying the power that's at work in you is the very same power that God used to raise the physically dead body of Jesus to life. Amazing. Look what he says in Ephesians 3:20. We often quote this verse, but we stop short of one of the major points. He says, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly above all that we can ask or think [that's where we usually stop, but notice how he goes on] according to the power that works within us." You see, Paul is referring to the amazing reality that when it comes to making us like Jesus Christ, God can go far beyond what we could ever imagine or we could ever think. This power that's at work in us. Colossians 1:27, Paul is talking about this mystery that he's been given. The mystery is simply that which used to be hidden, but now it's been revealed, and he says there's this great mystery of which I'm a steward.

I've been given the responsibility to teach about it. What is the mystery? Verse 26, he says here it is. And he finally gets to it in verse 27. "... God willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, [Here's the mystery, here's the punchline.] Christ in you, the hope of glory." You see, our only hope of glory is the power of Christ working in us. We depend on the power of God not only to save us, but also to sanctify us.

You know, it's so hard for us to get our arms around the power of God, because we're so weak, and we're so feeble, and we find ourselves so challenged to do what we want to do, even the smallest things. One image that Scripture uses more than twenty times to illustrate the power of God is lightning. In fact, if you want a fascinating read, go [later – we're not going to turn there now – but go] to Job 36, toward the end of the chapter – I think it's verse 26, somewhere in there – through the rest of the chapter, then all of chapter 37, because Elihu, the only one of Job's four friends that God didn't condemn, comes in and makes a speech that's quite interesting, and he talks about God's power in the storm and in lightning. Lightning is a truly powerful force. I did a little reading this week about lightning.

I don't know if you know this, but every second, every second that ticks by, 100 lightning strikes hit the earth. One strike can be up to nine miles long. And it travels at the speed of light -- 186,000 miles a second. In fact, the strike, that brilliant strike of light across the sky that we see is in reality the return strike. It goes from the ground up to the sky, but because it travels at 186,000 miles a second, we can't pick that up. We assume it's from the sky down. But that flash is from the ground up. The highest electrical voltage that you have or most of us have in our homes is 220 volts, that goes to help most of our major appliances work, 220 volts. A single strike of lightning is more than a million volts, excuse me, 100 million volts of electricity, 100 million volts. It heats the air around the strike to more than 60,000 degrees Fahrenheit, as hot as

the surface of the sun. And that super-heated air as that electricity slices the air and then that air crashes back into that area creates this pressure wave that causes what we call thunder. Incredible power.

You know what God wants us to know? The energy that lightning expends is the mere fringes of the power of God. That's why after describing God's power in the storm and in the lightning, Elihu says this: God is clothed with awesome majesty, the Almighty we cannot find Him. He is great in power. And the power of God, the same power that causes the lightning that creates the storm, the same power that raised up Jesus from the dead is at work in you this very moment if you're in Christ. What an incredible reality. You see, if you want to grasp God's role in your sanctification, then you need to understand the energy at work in you.

Secondly, Paul says you need to understand the extent of God's work. You need to understand the extent of God's work. Notice he says God is at work in you. Now this could be translated either inside you or among you, meaning corporately there in the church in Philippi. But because of the personal nature of salvation, and because He's just said individually, work out your own salvation, it's best to take this as the NAS has, meaning inside you, in you. Think about that for a moment. You know, we become so familiar sometimes with Christian truth that the gravity, the shocking nature of it, doesn't hit us. Think about the fact that the eternal God of the universe is at work inside of you. Not merely presenting truth to you from the outside, instead God is using His mighty power to do something down deep, deep in the depths of your soul. Paul often reminds us that God is at work in us.

Turn for example to Romans 8. Romans 8:9. He says, however, you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. Notice how two times in those two verses, Paul makes this point. Verse 9, the Spirit of God dwells in you. Verse 10, Christ is in you. He wants us to understand this reality. In Galatians 2:20 (which we won't turn to) you remember Paul says that Christ lives in me. In Colossians 1:27, we just examined, he said that it's Christ in you, the hope of glory. When the New Testament identifies the specific member of the Trinity that inhabits us, that indwells us, it identifies Him as the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, he puts it this way: He says do you not know that your body is a temple? Think about that. Your body is a temple. It is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God. If you're in Christ, everywhere you go, you carry around in a sense --

although He's everywhere, He doesn't move with you, but in a sense you carry around with you the third person of the Trinity. He's in you. That's the extent of His work. The third person of the Trinity is resident inside you, using all the power of a sovereign God to transform you. Now that raises a crucial question. What exactly is this mysterious, powerful transforming work that God is daily accomplishing deep down inside of us?

Well that brings us to the third key feature Paul identifies here in verse 13, and that is, you need to understand the essence of God's work in you. You need to understand the essence of God's work in you. What exactly is God doing? OK, there's this powerful energy, and it's inside you, and God is resident there. What's He doing? Notice, he says God is at work in you, both to will and to work. There in those two brief infinitives is the work of God deep down in your heart. He is working in you both to will and to work. D. A. Carson, commentator on this passage, says,

God Himself is working in us both to will and to act. He works in us at the level of our wills, and at the level of our doing. God works in us to supply the determination in our wills to obey Him, and then He works in us to supply the power to carry it out in action.

Now, let's look at those two individually. First of all, "to will". This is the essence of what God is doing in your heart, inside of you, inside of me. God is working in you to will. This word "will" refers to a thoughtful, purposeful choice or decision. You see, God has given us a capacity of soul, a capacity in our souls, to make decisions, to make choices. We call that a will. That will is free in the sense that we really do make choices. When you chose to get up and come this morning, you really did make a choice. We're free to choose many things. When you go out to lunch after the service is over, you can choose off the menu whatever you want, of course within your budget. If you're going home, then you have two choices as I did when I was growing up: take it or leave it.

You'll make a free choice tomorrow morning, whether to sleep in, hit the snooze button and roll over, or whether to go to work. But there are several important limitations on our will. We do make real choices, but there are limitations on our will. What are those limitations?

Number 1: let me give you several. Now, this is important background. Stay with me, because you need to understand this to understand what God is doing. First of all, our wills are influenced by people all the time. Our wills are influenced by others all the time. Yes, we make choices, but not uninfluenced choices.

Let me give you an example: those in authority over us. Let's take especially parents and children. You tell a child to pick up her toys. That child has a free will. She can choose to go pick up her toys as you told her, or what? To get a spanking. To be disciplined. When you see, you know you see it in your children, you give them the command and you watch, and for this brief moment, the child totters on the horns of a dilemma. Do I keep doing what I want to do, or do I obey, and then the child trots off to pick up the toys. Now, was that her choice? Yes. She made a free choice to do that, but was that a free, uninfluenced choice? No, it wasn't. It was seriously influenced by what? By the breath, the hot air of her parent breathing on her neck. As R. C. Sproul told his son, I have a free will, and you have a free will, but my will is more free than yours. You see, our wills are often influenced by others, even though we make the decision.

There's a second limitation on our wills. We cannot exercise free will in anything that involves physical or intellectual capacities. For example, I wish this weren't true, but nobody sitting here this morning can determine by an act of your free will, to run a 4-minute mile. It's not going to happen. You can try all you want, you can make all the decisions you want, but it's not going to happen. You can't change that physical capacity by the act of your free will. Nor can you change your intellectual capacity. You can't sit there and will yourself to have 50 points more in IQ. That would be another nice little benefit, wouldn't it? But it can't happen, it's not going to happen.

But thirdly, the third limitation, and most importantly, the Bible teaches that our wills are not free to choose what is spiritually good. We would never have chosen God on our own. Why? Because the will always chooses what brings it the greatest delight. When you make a choice, it's because that's what you want to do, that's what will bring you the greatest degree of happiness. Like that child. Did the child really want to pick up her toys? No. But she would get greater happiness out of picking up her toys than getting a spanking. So, she made the choice at that moment of what would bring her the greatest happiness or delight. Because of the fall, our wills delight only in what is evil. Man is free to choose, but he will never choose what is good.

You know, I don't think Paul puts this more clearly anywhere else than in Romans 3. Turn there for a moment. Romans 3. Notice what he says in verse 10. He says,

as it is written, there is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become useless. There is none who does good, not even one.

Not a single person ever chooses spiritual good. You see, Adam had the capacity to choose what is good. He had a free will in that sense, but when he sinned, he lost the ability to choose good. Now, no one has a will that's free to choose what is spiritually good. Let me illustrate it for you this way. Imagine for a moment a person standing on the edge of a deep, steep slippery pit. As long as that person is standing up on the edge, that person has the free will to choose either to remain on that edge, to walk away, or to jump in the pit. He can choose any of those things. But the moment he decides to jump in, he loses one aspect of his free will. What's that? To stay out of the pit. Now, once he gets to the bottom of the pit, he still has free will, and he can walk or sit around, sit – excuse me, he can walk around or sit— he can try to escape, or he can accept his plight philosophically. He can call for help or he can be silent, he can be angry, he can be complacent, but he no longer has the free will to again be on the edge of the embankment.

That is a perfect illustration of what happened to Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve chose to sin, they jumped into the pit, and now all of us are born in the pit. We have free will in the sense that we can do whatever we want there at the bottom of the pit, but we can never will ourselves to be back up out of that pit. We are unable to choose God. Boyce puts it this way: “No one does come to God until God reaches down by grace into the mud pit of human sin and impotence and lifts him up and places him again on the banks and says, this is the way, walk in it.”

Now, that's important background. When we get to Philippians 2:13, here's what Paul is saying. Paul is saying that from the moment of salvation, God has been working on your will. He's been working on your will. Now, you say, well, does that mean we're simply robots? Does God force our wills? No, absolutely not. God does something much more amazing and much more gracious. And that is, He changes or persuades our will (I should say). He persuades our will by changing our desires. We choose because of the work of God in us. Augustine, I think, put it best. Augustine did a lot of writing on this issue. He put it best when he said this. He said, basically the will chooses what brings it most delight. This is universal. Listen, quote:

Every man, whatever his condition, desires to be happy. There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things. [That's what everybody seeks. So, he goes on to say,] Our will chooses what's going to bring us the greatest happiness. Our will chooses based on what we delight in. [But here's the problem: it's not in our power (listen carefully), it's not in our power to determine what we delight in. We can't change that. That's who we are. Listen to Augustine again:] Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? We have to delight in

something to embrace it. But who has it in his power to insure that something that will delight will turn up, or that he will take delight in what turns up? [Listen, you don't have that power.] If those things delight us, which serve our advancement toward God, that is do not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the grace which He bestows.

You see what he's saying? Augustine is saying, listen, if you have a desire to do something that pleases and honors God, to pursue your spiritual holiness, then that is the result of the work of God on your will. He's changed your desires, and the fact that you've made a decision to pursue that, it's because God has been at work in changing your desires and helping direct your will in that sense.

Now you say, OK, that's Augustine. But does the Bible really say this? I mean, is this how God really works in our hearts? Well, there are a lot of biblical illustrations of it. Let me just give you a couple. Turn to 1 Kings 8, 1 Kings 8:58. Solomon is praying, and when he finished his entire prayer, he offers this benediction, and he says, verse 57,

May the LORD our God be with us as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself....

You hear what Solomon is saying, what He's really asking in this benediction? He's saying, God, I want You to incline our hearts toward Yourself. I want you to create in us a desire for You. You see it again in 2 Chronicles 30, 2 Chronicles 30. The context: Hezekiah has just become king. The king before him, Ahaz, had bolted, literally bolted the doors to the temple. Hezekiah comes along, and he says, listen, we haven't even celebrated Passover. We got to celebrate Passover. So, in verse 1 of 2 Chronicles 30, Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters, and he says, listen, come and celebrate the Passover. Well, sadly, verse 10 says that as they took this letter around, the couriers did, from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, they laughed him to scorn and mocked him. People said no way, we're not coming. Nevertheless, verse 11 says, some men of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.

Why? Verse 12, "The hand of God was also on Judah, in addition to Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun, some of those, to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the Word of the LORD." You see, the reason these chose to come and celebrate the Passover, because God was at work in their hearts to change their desires; therefore, they decided to come

and celebrate the Passover. You see it in so many other places. Let's look at just a couple more. Turn to Ezra 1:1. "Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the Word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia so that he sent a proclamation..." How did God do that? Did God make him? No. God changed his desire, or he worked at the area of his desires, and he chose to send out this proclamation. Verse 5, same thing, "Then the heads of the fathers' *households* of Judah and Benjamin and the priest and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred up, to go up and rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." God again at work on the desires, not forcing someone, but rather creating in them a desire which moved their will to act. That's reminiscent, isn't it, of Proverbs 21:1, where it says the king's heart is like a channel in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it whichever way He wills. It doesn't mean God forces the king to do something, to choose against his will. It means God works at the level of desires to direct the will.

Lloyd Jones, speaking of Philippians 2:13, that God works to will, describes it this way:

"It means that every good desire, every Christian thought and aspiration which I have, is something which has been produced in me by God. God controls my willing; it is God who energizes my very desires and hopes and aspirations and thoughts. He stimulates it all." [God is at work in me. His mighty energy is producing in me the ability to will, to choose that which pleases Him.]

It goes on, Paul does, in verse 13 of Chapter 2, to say, and to work. You see, God not only works to change our desires which changes our wills, but God also enables us to follow through on what we've decided. God mightily empowers our spiritual activity. You can read Hebrews 13:20-21, where it says God equips us to do His will. God is the one who gives us the power to do what we decided to do that's spiritually good, and He's the one that had directed us to pursue that spiritual good. You see, every time you have any desire to pursue spiritual things, it's a work of God. When you make a decision to act on that holy spiritual desire, that decision is God's doing. When you actually follow through and do it, God is the one working in you providing you with the power to carry that out in real life. God is at work in you, both to will and to work.

Why does God do all of this? Very briefly, you need fourthly to understand the end of God's work, understand the end of God's work. Paul says He does it for His good pleasure. What goal does God have in mind when he's working so constantly and mightily in us? Only this. For His good pleasure. He does it because it pleases Him to do so. Does that mean that God is just self-

gratifying, He's just after what he can get? No. You see, God is loving, and God is good, so what brings Him the greatest pleasure is to show His love and goodness to those He loves. He does it, and it brings Him pleasure. As one commentator says, it delights God to delight His people. That's the end for which God does all of this in you.

Finally, the final feature of God's work, very briefly: you must understand the example of God's work in you. Understand the example. It's in that little word that begins the verse, "for". Paul is drawing a logical link between these two verses. You see, God doesn't work because we have worked. Exactly the opposite is true. We're to work because God is at work in us. Some people think that if you tell people that God is at work in them, and He's the only one that can change them, and that He's at work in their hearts, you'll discourage their efforts. Exactly the opposite is true. Paul says if you tell them, listen, God is mightily working in you to make in you the image of His son, and then you tell them to work, that's going to provide a great incentive for them to work.

Well, my time is gone, but I need to give one final clarification for you. We've talked over these five weeks about sanctification. What does God do in sanctification, and what am I responsible to do? Let me give you a sort of logical flow, very briefly.

First of all, God gives us a new nature. The moment of salvation He gives us a new nature. God unites us to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. God works to free us from sin's dominion, to give us the power to obey. God creates in us the desire for the truth. All of that God does.

Then the believer is supposed to take that desire for the truth that God has implanted in him, and he's supposed to read and study and meditate on the Word of God, and as you and I do that, that's our responsibility, as we do that, the Holy Spirit illumines our understanding. We understand the truth as we've never understood it before. It comes alive.

And then the believer seeks to obey the truth we've discovered through the work of the Holy Spirit by applying that truth to ourselves. We work a plan. We discipline ourselves to change our habits of thinking and behaving as we talked about last week, and as we work hard, God then does something amazing, as we've discovered in verse 13. He creates a new desire in our wills. He causes us to make holy decisions, and then He empowers our actual doing of those decisions. He produces lasting change in our inner man. That's how sanctification flows.

So, get busy, get busy doing all that we talked about the last four weeks. Expend the maximum effort. Cultivate the soil of your heart. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is mightily at work in you, with all of the divine energy to change your will, and to give you the power to act for His good pleasure.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are so grateful for all that You are doing in us. We find it so comforting, Lord, when we look at ourselves, we become discouraged, because while we're not what we used to be, we're certainly not what we want to be. And Lord, I pray that You would encourage us with the reality that You are at work constantly in us to make us into the image of Your Son.

Lord, thank You that You are changing our desires, You're changing our wills, You're (changing) giving us the power to act on those holy decisions. Father, I pray that You'd help us to be diligent, to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, to be in Your Word, to be putting off the deeds and attitudes of the old man, to being renewed in our understanding through your Word to have our the spirit of our minds shifted, to be putting on those things that are in keeping with the new man who we are in Christ.

Lord, I pray for the person here this morning who still lives at the bottom of the pit, unable to do anything that pleases You. I pray this morning, You would produce in them repentance and faith, that You would draw them to Yourself, that they would turn to Christ and be saved.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.