

## “Shine Like Stars”

Today we confront the doctrine of Christian sanctification.

The idea here is that we have been saved, reconciled unto God through faith in Christ, for a purpose. The purpose for which we have been saved is a life holiness unto God, all for the glory of God. That’s what sanctification is; it is God making us holy.

In sanctification God is seeking to restore all that was lost in Adam. God created Adam and Eve as holy creatures. Both were sinless and in that state of being they reflected the perfect image of God. But then they decided to go their own way and rebel against God. They choose idolatry. By eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they, by their actions, said to God I will live life on my own terms. I don’t need you God. I will do it my way. This decision ruined everything for everyone. It ruined our relationship with God and it ruined it with one another.

Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, came into the world to save us from the consequences of Adam’s decision. God granted Adam’s request to have it his way, but not without a caveat, death. That would be the wage for Adam’s sin. That’s what life apart from God always equals, death. But Jesus was sent on a rescue mission by the Father to fix all of that for us. The Son stepped in our place to bear the penalty for our sin on the cross. He had to do this because God is holy. Justice demands that sin be given its proper verdict, but Jesus also had to do it because God is also a God of love, in spite of our sin and rebellion. So on the cross, the Father, through the giving of his Son, makes payment for our sin in our place and restores us back into fellowship with God and neighbor. When we receive this gift by faith it becomes our salvation.

But that is only half the story. Now God wants to change our lives so that we can recover all that was lost in Adam. God wants to eradicate the sin in our lives that messes everything up and make us holy because it is only in pursuing holiness that we will experience the purpose for which God created us for. Think about that. Holiness is not supposed to feel like slavery, but it is to be experienced as something that is liberating because it connects us back to God. Sin equals death. Faith in Christ equals reconciliation and life. The pursuit of holiness equals joy, contentment, and peace.

### **You, Work Out Your Salvation**

Thus we come today to Paul’s admonition to the Philippians to “work out their salvation with fear and trembling.”

In short, what he is saying to the Philippians continue to make progress in your life of obedience unto the Lord. Love God’s commands. Obey God’s commands. Continue to open your lives up to Christ by letting Jesus change you from the inside out. Let the Lord make you into the new

creation that he intends for you to be. That's what he saved you for, so "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

This exhortation in v.12 has been the subject of some controversy in Biblical interpretation. It goes like this: Paul is always telling us in his letters that we are saved by the grace of God alone, through faith in Christ alone, and not by our works. It is Jesus and his perfect life that he lived for us and his perfect death that he died for us that makes us right with God, nothing else. We are justified (made right with God) by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law. Yet here in this text Paul is telling us to "work out our salvation." Which is it? Faith or works?

There is no contradiction here. You will notice that Paul is *not* saying work out your justification.

You can't be *justified* by God through obeying his commands, the law. Our justification (*our being made right with God*) is the free gift of the Savior that we receive by faith alone. That is how we are saved.

We don't work out our justification, for that is a free gift from God, but once we are saved we are called to live into our salvation. This is what Paul is talking about in the text. He is talking producing the good fruit that God intends to produce in our lives once he saves us in Christ. In Christian theology we call that sanctification, and it means to grow in holiness unto God all for the glory of God. That is what Paul is exhorting the church to do when he says "work out your salvation with fear and trembling."

### **Work Out Your Salvation in the Strength of God**

But look at the wonderful balance that Paul brings to the exhortation in v. 13.

After he tells them to work out the implications of their salvation he then tells the Philippians that it is "God who works in them to will and to act according to his good purpose."

What that means is that even though we have a responsibility to grow in holiness unto God, to obey his commands, and to seek the mind and the heart of Jesus Christ in our lives, it is not something we can do in our own strength.

Paul's theology is so God-centered that even when he speaks to the Philippians about what they are to do, he keeps them ever mindful that even that is a gift from God. God must empower them for the life of sanctification. That's why tells the church that it is God who gives them the strength to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

In this portion of the letter Paul does not tell the church how God does this, but I would like to take a few moments to share with you a few things that God does give to us that enable us to live this kind of life.

- First, God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, comes to take up residence in our hearts and the Spirit empowers us to grow in holiness unto God.
- Second, God gives us His Word, the Bible. Here is our spiritual food. If we “eat the scroll” we will live, if we ignore it we won’t. God’s Word empowers us to live this kind of life that Paul is exhorting us to live in Philippians 2.
- Third, prayer. I have heard it said that prayer is a lot more about changing our hearts and minds than it is the heart and mind of God. God is not the one who is in need of change, it is us, and prayer does that because it keeps us connected to the One who wants to change us into his image.
- Finally, the church. It is in the church that we encounter the Word of God corporately in worship, preaching, teaching, and the sacraments, and it is these things that empower us for the Christian life. It is also in the church that we encounter one another in Christian community. God gives us brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage us to live out the Christian faith.

All of these things come from God and are given to us by God so that we might be enabled to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” For it is truly God who “works in us the will to act according to his good purpose in our lives.”

### **Work Out Your Salvation by Working for Unity in the Church**

Growing in holiness unto God takes on many facets in our lives, but in this text Paul has one particular facet in mind. It is unity in the church and I have already talked about that on several occasions.

There is a rift in this congregation between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. They are believers in Jesus Christ and they are members of the church in Philippi, but they have had a falling out of sorts.

Perhaps this falling out has spread out into the wider congregation and Paul has wrote this letter with the intent of helping this good church grow in holiness unto God by encouraging them to mend this rift that has occurred. So as Paul talks to them in this text about “working out their salvation with fear and trembling” he tells them that they ought to do everything “without complaining or arguing, so that they may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation...” (v.14)

When Paul says that to the church he is telling all parties involved that now is the time to stop complaining, arguing, backbiting, nitpicking, and accusing one another. Bring this hostility to a close. Mend this rift. This is part of your responsibility in Christian sanctification.

As we think about this exhortation to end this division we must keep in mind what Paul has *already* has said earlier in this letter.

It's not that Paul is just saying to the church stop fighting. He wants them to do more than that.

He wants the issue to actually be resolved and the only way that can happen is by doing what he told them to do earlier in the text. Be unified in Christ. Seek his mind, his will, and his purpose for your life and this battle in your church will come to an end.

Yes, raise the white flag. Call a truce. Quit crumbling, complaining, and arguing, but do more than that. Go and seek the mind of Christ!

Stand firm “in the one Spirit;” be “united in the cause of the gospel.” In Christ be “like-minded, have the same love, and be one in spirit and purpose.” If you will do this, this rift will heal. That is what Paul has in mind when he writes these words in v. 14-15 of the text.

### **Now Shine Like Stars!**

After Paul finishes his exhortation in v.12-15 of the text he then talks about the good fruit that their sanctification will produce in the world.

He says to the church that as you “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” by bringing this division to a close your lives will “shine like stars in the universe, as you hold out the word of life...”

What beautiful imagery Paul uses here. When church grows, both individually and corporately, in the grace of sanctification, its life, ministry, and witness to the world will “shine like stars in the universe.”

To translate that in the language of the common man, it means that one of most powerful witnesses for Christ that we can ever have is *not* our words, but the fruit of our lives. If we “work out our salvation with fear and trembling,” if we grow in holiness to God, and if the fruit of that growth manifests itself in our lives through unity in the church, then our Christian lives will radiate our faith out into the world in a positive way.

The Old Testament teaches us that God called Israel, his chosen people, to be a “light to the nations.” Her life and relationship to the Lord was to shine into the world for the benefit of the Gentiles.

God's intent was to use the light of Israel to bring into the fold people from all four corners of the earth. God fulfilled that promise by bringing forth a Savior from her, who died on a cross for

the sins of the world, so that people from every tongue, tribe, and nation could be reconciled unto God. And now as believers in Jesus Christ Paul is reminding the Philippians that they too have been engrafted into this salvation story, and they too are to “shine like stars in the universe,” through their growth in sanctification.

This does not mean that our words aren’t important when it comes to our lives “shining like stars,” because Paul also tells us that we are also to “hold out the word of life” to the world as well.

By this I think Paul means that we are to preach and teach the gospel and we are to share it, because if we don’t then people won’t know. Living a life of holiness is *not* enough when it comes to our lives shining like stars, for we must tell the story too. “How can they believe in the one in whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14-15)

### **Conclusion**

I have called this message “shine like stars” because that what God wants our lives to do in the dark world, both individually and as a church.

Jesus himself said in the Sermon on the Mount that “We are the light of the world, a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.”

Christians are not to light their lamps and then put it under a bowl, but instead we are to set it up high on the stand for all the world to see. We are to let our lives shine before all men so that they may see our good *deeds* and praise our faith in heaven. (Matt. 5:14-16)

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ “work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” always knowing that it is God who gives you the grace and power to do so, so that your lives will “shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” to the world, all for the sake of Christ and the salvation of his people.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.