

The Responsibility of Sanctification  
*God's Plan of Redemption*  
By Steve Viars



**Bible Text:** Philippians 2:1-18  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 12, 2013

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You know that one of the metaphors that are used to help us understand the work of the Holy Spirit is that its ministry to us is like the wind. Whether you're walking or running or riding your bike, you know what it's like to be going with the wind or going against it. And it's amazing how much progress you're making when the wind is at your back. You're not always sure when you're in that situation, is this my strength, is this the wind's assistance? But at some point, I guess, it doesn't really matter you just know that because you're heading in the right direction you are making incredible progress. Well, that's one of the marks of an effective mother, it's one of the reasons so many moms are able to accomplish so much in the lives of their children. It's because the goals that they have for their children and the goals that the Holy Spirit has for their children are identical. As one writer put it, getting in step with the Spirit. She's parenting with the wind and a lot is begin accomplished as a result.

Now, somebody might say, "Well, how do I know what God's goals are for my children, or how do I know what God's goals are for myself?" That's one of the great things about this subject is that the Holy Spirit wrote a book. He didn't leave us wondering about the direction, he wrote a book. Incidentally, he did that with his breath. That's what it means for the Bible to be inspired, it's the Greek word *theopneustos*, *theos/God, pneustos/breath*. The word of God is literally breathed out from God. We don't have to guess what God's goals are for our children or ourselves it's plainly spelled out in the word.

And one of the key concepts is the matter of our sanctification. You say, "Which direction is the Holy Spirit of God wanting to blow us." The answer is, "Our sanctification and growing and changing progressively over time to become more of what God wants us to be. Emphasized in places like 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:3, I mean just how much plainer can it be that this, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." Or what we saw last week in John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth." Or this great passage, Romans chapter 6:19, "For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness resulting in further lawlessness now present your members as slaves..." Incidentally, just hang onto that metaphor, it's going to come back later on. "...as slaves to righteousness resulting in sanctification." Or this marvelous passage, Ephesians, chapter 5 verse, 25 and 26, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her." Why? Why? "...so that Christ might

sanctify her.” That is, the church. “...so that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word.” You see that over and over and over in the Bible, God’s will for us is our sanctification.

It’s also alluded to in many great texts in the Bible, even though the word “sanctification” might not be used the principle is clearly there. Like 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:18, the last recorded words we have from the Apostle Peter, it says, “But grow...” there it is, be sanctified, “... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

So no question about the fact that God’s goal is that we be changing and growing and becoming more pleasing to him and more and more like his son. And many mothers here today would say, “And that’s exactly why I wake up every day. To help myself and help my child develop a genuine love for God and a hunger and a thirst for righteousness to grow up and live a life that brings honor to the Lord.” When a mom or when any of us, for that matter, heading in that direction she can be sure of this, she is riding with the wind. She may not be able to fully discern in the heat of the moment, “Is this me working or God working?” but for certain, “I know we’re working together because we’re heading in the same direction.”

It’s that very relationship and that very process we want to study this morning. We’re talking about the responsibility of sanctification. With that in mind, open your Bible if you would to Philippians chapter 2, that’s page 154 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

We’re starting to land the plane on this series we’ve been doing the last couple of months on God’s plan for our redemption. We’re talking about the doctrine of soteriology. All scripture tells us about how God planned for the salvation of people who have chosen to rebel against him. And it’s a marvelous story, absolutely marvelous because the Bible tells us that the Lord planned it to be a matter of grace and a matter of faith and a matter of adoption and election and regeneration and justification in union with Christ. All of that and more were planned by God before the foundation of the world. That’s how much God loves you and that’s how long he’s been thinking about you.

This morning we want to add a very important ingredient that’s a topic of special focus on the part of Christians mom’s whether they would ever use this particular word or not and which ought to be a topic of special focus to all of God’s people. It’s the matter of our sanctification.

Let’s read beginning in Philippians chapter 2 verse 5, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 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. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those

who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Now here are our key verses for this morning, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence,” here it is, “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. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom...” that is if you’re working out your salvation, if sanctification is occurring, “...among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain...” but even if I’m being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all, “You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”

We’re talking about the responsibility of sanctification and think with me now about three principles to help us cooperate with God’s plan for our growth. It starts here friends, progressive sanctification is a process and that’s emphasized in many places in the book of Philippians and I understand a number of people who will be with us today are brand new to studying the Bible. In fact, for some you’ll be celebrating your first Mother’s Day as a follower of Christ, that’s pretty exciting isn’t it? And I realize all of this study of the Word of God might be new and I would just say if that’s your situation this might be a very good book to try to master this summer because it is relatively easy to understand, it is intensely practical.

And here’s what that process might look like, you might decide that you’re going to read the book of Philippians once a week as part of your daily Bible study plan. It only takes a few minutes to do that, it’s only four chapters long. You also may want to have a Study Bible along with you or maybe a devotional commentary where if there is something about the text that you don’t readily understand you can go to your Study Bible or commentary and gain exactly what that means. And then if you spend the summer looking for opportunities to apply specifically what the book of Philippians is saying in real time, here’s what’ll happen. Even if you’re brand new to all of this there is no reason that by the end of the summer you wouldn’t be able to check this one off your Bible book bucket list. In other words, you’ve got one nailed. Sixty-five more to go but that’s the way you learn the Word of God.

If you’ve already studied this book you know that Paul is writing it from prison. And the occasion is a love gift that had been sent from the Philippian church to the Apostle Paul to help him and encourage him during this challenging time in his life and ministry. So that there is a sense in which now what Paul is writing, it’s a thank-you note. Back to people who are very dear to him, very supportive of how God has been using him in the advancement of the gospel. So this is not like, for example, the book of Galatians, people who have fallen into serious error and needed rebuke. These were people who were heading in the right direction in a lot of different ways but now Paul is encouraging them in their sanctification. He’s encouraging them in their growth, encouraging them to keep

developing their love for the Lord and the maturity of their Christian character. You see that theme throughout the book, "You're doing well, keep going."

In verses like this, Philippians 1:6, "For I'm confident of this very thing that he who began a good work in you will perfect it." You're not where you need to be yet until the day of Christ Jesus. Or Philippians 1:9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment." Or later in that same chapter, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you for all your progress and joy in the faith so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming again." And those are just illustrative examples. We could march our way through the book of Philippians and find example after example of how Paul is trying to emphasize that this matter of sanctification, at least in some ways, is certainly a process.

This is probably as good a time as any just to be sure we're clear even about the meaning of the word. "Sanctify" literally means to set apart for a particular use, sort of to make holy. So when Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane before going to the cross to die for our sin, "Sanctify them through thy truth, your Word is truth." He was praying that God would lead people like you and me in a process of change. "Sanctify them," that would literally be life-long. That we would be progressively set apart for a particular use. Jesus was thinking a lot about that even prior to his death.

This is where we really need to put our thinking caps on, you ready? Because as is true with a number of concepts in the scripture, there is both a positional aspect of this and a practical aspect. It's really important that we make that distinction. So what do we mean, a positional aspect and a practical aspect? When a person admits their sin and places their faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord and I hope you've done that, I really do, but the moment that happens scripture says literally hundreds of things occur in your position before God. And those are instantaneous acts, they can't be altered because they're based on the finished work of Christ. That is all then wrapped up in your identity in Christ and that's as true of you the moment you're saved as much as it is of me or anybody else in this room. It happens instantaneously, it is now true of your position, it's all wrapped up in your identity in Christ. We refer to that as the gospel indicatives, who you now are.

There's also on the other hand, processes that begin when you're saved that continue to be worked out during the rest of your natural life. That those are the gospel imperatives. Here's what you're to do as a result of understanding who you are. When you're studying a passage of scripture you always have to ask, "Is this speaking about positional truth or is this speaking about practical truth?" If you don't ask that question of a passage of scripture you will be confused for sure. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "I wonder if my pastor loves me enough to actually have prepared a quiz right now to help me be sure I understand the difference?" Are you thinking that right now? Why sure I love you that much, I hope you're feeling it. Here's your quiz.

Let me give you two verses from the same book of the Bible and you tell me is that speaking positionally or is that speaking practically. Ready? Are you excited about a little

quiz on Mother's Day? Absolutely. Here we go, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:15, "But like the holy one who called you be holy yourselves also in all your behaviors." Is that positional or is that practical? and then compare that to this verse, "But you are a chosen race, you are a royal priesthood, you are a holy nation, a people of God's possession." Now wait a minute, are you holy? Or are you supposed to be becoming holy? What's the answer to that question? Yes, I'm not trying to trick you. I love you. Both are true. When Peter says in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:9, "You are a holy nation," that's speaking positionally. It's who you are in Christ, it's part of the gospel indicatives, it's focused on your identity. But then when Peter says in chapter 1 verse 15, "Be holy yourselves and all your behavior," that's speaking practically, it's a gospel imperative. Here's what you're supposed to do as a result of who you are.

Then what about sanctification? Does the Bible speak about us being set apart positionally or does the Bible speak about us being set apart practically or progressively? What's the answer to that question? We're back to the both and I'm going to skip this passage in Hebrews just for the sake of time but this chart was adapted from a book called "The Theology of Christian Counseling" that will help us, I think, kind of set in context the various topics that we've discussed and which ones are what from the perspective of what I'm talking about right now, position or practice. You have regeneration, being born again, that is an act, that happens once and God is the one who initiates the process of regeneration. At that same time there's conversion, repentance and faith. And I'm talking about in order to become a Christian. That doesn't happen over and over and over, it happens once and God enables man to do it.

Then there's justification. We've studied that important doctrine a couple of weeks ago. That too, is an act. If you just trusted Christ as Savior and Lord this week, you are every bit as justified as any other Christian in this room. That happens once, it is an act, it is based on the finished work of Christ, it is absolute, it is unalterable. Praise God for all of that.

Now there's also the moment that happens positional, sanctification. In other words, you're set apart on the account books of heaven, there's no question that that happens as an act once and for all and God alone does it. But what we're especially focusing on today is progressive sanctification. Unlike the others, this is a process. This happens the rest of your natural life and God enables man to do it. By the way and Lord willing we'll talk about this a couple of weeks from now, there's also glorification. Think about that. That can happen before the sun sets on this Mother's Day. Wouldn't that be something? That too, is an act and God alone does that.

What's the point of this chart? It's just to show that in contrast to much of what we've studied the last several weeks, at least an aspect of the sanctification process is ongoing, ongoing. Which on the one hand ought to give us great hope because what that means is that God does not expect you to be perfect today. There's some good news for those of us who want to be honest about how we're doing. But on the other hand, if it's a process that means this is a challenge. Because it's a process on which we ought to be devoting significant energy and attention every day. Because sanctification growing progressively

over time is one of the primary reasons God saved us to begin with. If you're not on this you need to get on this. Illustrated in places like John 15:16 where Jesus said, "You didn't choose me, I chose you. And appointed you that you would go and bear fruit." There it is, be sanctified and that your fruit would remain. "So that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

I think there's a couple of questions that flow out of what we've talked about already. One, has there been a definite time in your life where you admitted your need? And you placed your faith and trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as your only hope of eternity and at that moment, you were positionally sanctified. If not, we would invite you to make that decision today. God stands ready to forgive you, God stands ready to make you one of this children, but you have to choose to believe. And if you've never done that, I would invite you to do that today and the great news is, we see men and women making that decision week after week after week. It's so thrilling, that's one of the signs of life is new birth. If you've not done that we would invite you to do that today.

Secondly, I would ask you this if you are a follower of Christ, how much emphasis are you placing in the process of sanctification every day? See if that is God's will for you, and it clearly is according to these verses that we've already seen, then how much are you in step with his goal on a practical and specific basis? Are you riding the bike of your life with the wind or against it? And the reason some who will hear this sermon today would say, "Man, my life is not working out very well, I feel like I'm constantly riding against the wind." It's because you are. You're not concerned about Christian growth, you're not concerned about sanctification, you're not concerned about using your time and using your life to fulfill God's plan for you. You'd better believe you are riding against the wind.

But for those who would say this, "I'm concerned about this big time." That's one of the reasons you're making progress is because the Holy Spirit is enabling you to do what he wants you to do. I would also ask you this, "Do you or did you have a mom who had very similar goals for you as the Holy Spirit did or does?" Where she really wanted you to help change and become all that God wanted you to be. I hope if you would say, "Yes, I did," that you'll be very thankful for her today. Even if at times what she was trying to do in your life as part of the sanctification process was a bit uncomfortable. Like this mom who apparently got a bit weary of her kiddies not being able to get along so she bought one t-shirt and she had both kids wear one t-shirt and she titled it, "our get along shirt." And I don't know how well you can see their faces in that picture. They're not exactly praising Jesus for momma right about now.

Let's drill further down into our key verses where we learn that progressive sanctification is a balance. You saw that didn't you? Lock onto this now in your mind, "So then my beloved just as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence," here it is, "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." Clearly the emphasis here is that progressive sanctification it's a balance.

Let's break the text down to be sure we understand who is responsible for what. Clearly you have to work at growing. Is that a clear rendering of this text? You have to work at growing. The Greek word here is *katergazomai*, it means to bring about, to produce, to work something out because you understand the value of words like "work" and "sacrifice" and "repentance" and "obedience." See work out your own salvation.

Here's why I raise that this morning, there's a curious doctrinal emphasis gaining traction in a lot of evangelical churches right now which is sometimes called the "grace movement." What, we don't believe in grace? Well, of course we believe in grace but we believe in grace in a way that is balanced with all the other things that scripture says about the Christian life. But the grace movement is suggesting that justification completed the sanctification process. And so now you just passively allow Jesus to live his life through you or you simply live in light of what has already been accomplished at the cross. Therefore, any effort on your part is actually a form of legalism and it's unnecessary. And I realize some will say, "What?" Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about and this is becoming more and more prominent in evangelical circles.

Let me try to illustrate the problem practically. We have all sort of twitterlogians now, you know that? Who like to come up with catchy statements in a 140 characters or less. Or who post catchy sayings on Facebook without taking the time to balance what they're saying with the rest of the scripture. For example, not long ago a well known evangelical, if I said his name you'd know it, said this, "Take your to-do list, write the word Jesus paid it all over the top and then throw away the list." In other words, you don't have any work to do today because Jesus did it all. Which is obviously a clear violation of what we're reading in Philippians 2:12 yet there it is.

Or this picture that was posted on Facebook not long ago, "Religion says do, Jesus does done. Religion said slave, Jesus said son." It even rhymes. "Religion puts you in bondage while Jesus sets you free." That's what I mean by twitterology. "Religion says do, Jesus says done?" Actually Jesus says both. In fact, you would have to work hard to cram more bad theology in a single Facebook post than that one. Jesus says both.

Positionally, it is done which frees us up practically to get to work. And people in this generation have to get to the place of valuing words like "work" and "effort" and "sacrifice" and "obedience." And the Lord didn't enable this church to accomplish what's been done here by a bunch of people sitting around drinking lattes and eating scones and contemplating theological lint in their corporate navels. Tweet that. I'm sorry for the word picture but there it is.

There's the important place of God's people getting busy working out their salvation, right? I mean isn't there the other side. We need balance and it's without the need for constant supervision. The text says, "So then my beloved just as you have always obeyed not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence." In other words, ultimately this is between you and the Lord and how much energy and attention you're willing to put into changing and growing and becoming what God desires, yourself. Sure,

we value body life, we value accountability, we value small groups but I hope you would say that this process of working out my salvation with fear and trembling, of producing fruit and keeping with my salvation it's something that is so important to me that I don't have to have other people constantly on me about it. I hope you could articulate specific ways that you're trying to grow right now, and specific processes that you have in place to make that happen and specific benchmarks and progress that has been made without the need for constant supervision.

And it's because of the delight of your example, it's because of where all of this is taking you. That's what why started by reading verse 5, have this attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus. That's one of the most wonderful passages in all the Word of God about the person and work of Christ and we're talking about changing to become more like the Son that our heavenly Father has given us as the Redeemer and a Savior and an example.

There's no question that one of the best gifts you could ever give your mother if she is still alive and a follower of Christ is the sincere effort to try to continue to develop Christ-like character. You want your mom to be able to say regardless of how old she is, in regardless of how old you are, you want your mom to be able to say, "I'm thankful my son is working at becoming more like Christ. I'm thankful for the way my daughter is working out her salvation in fear and trembling." Let me just say to you that if you're a young person here today and your mom and the Holy Spirit have been trying to direct you in a particular fashion and you have been bucking them and working against them, riding the bike of your life against the wind, here's a message from heaven, you need to repent. You say, "That's hard." Welcome to work. The work needs to start by repenting, by acknowledging the simpleness of the direction that you're going and crying out to God while he'll still forgive you and crying out to your momma. And asking forgiveness for the foolish way you have been living. Seriously, there will be people who hear this sermon today, that is *the best gift* you could ever give your mom. And it very well could be the starting point to riding the bike of your life with the wind of God and his Word because of the delight of your example.

Also, because you have a proper awe and reverence for God. The text says, "Work out your salvation..." how? "With fear and trembling." And by the way, let me just remind you that's in the New Testament. We have these persons that say, "But there's a God of the Old Testament and there's a God of the New." Seriously? There is such a thing as being so concerned about sanctification in part because the fear of God is in you. In fact, some of us would say, "My momma put the fear of God in me." Good, good for her. Because Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is...." What? "The beginning of knowledge." Fools despise wisdom. In fact, there will be some young people who about two minutes ago were really mad at me for what I said because they were despising it. Do the diagnosis based on Proverbs 1:7 of the kind of person you are. There it is.

See there's a seriousness to this because we want to be the kind of people who take our commitment to Jesus and accomplishing his will in our lives seriously. In fact, I loved one of the comments on the surveys that were turned in to our strategic planning process

was, “I like the fact that a lot of people around Faith seem to take their relationship with God seriously every day.” Exactly. And even in a book like Philippians which has a theme of joy. Joy yet we understand that joy comes through obedience, through change and that awe and that reverence for God is shown especially in his Word. And our desire to live by the Word, “Sanctify them and the truth, your Word is truth.” Also by following the process outlined in God’s Word this passage doesn’t give us specifics on how our salvation is to be worked out but there’s a lot of truth that is available if you’re interested in that topic. And I would just recommend to you some books that are in our Resource Center like this one, “How People Change” by Tim Lane and Paul Tripp. Or this one, “Lord Change Me” by James McDonald. Or “Changed into His Image” by Jim Burr. All of those are excellent resources to help us understand how to change.

Also, we added some additional resources on our website today and so if you go to that, if you go to today’s message and then if you go down to the bottom of that page where it talks about “Additional Resources,” there’s a place called “Notes” and we have a lecture from our counseling training program on the process of sanctification along with some notes that ought to be very helpful to you if you want to continue to study that.

Where does this lead? You say if we as a church are growing at the rate that God wants us to grow, well it’s a commitment to the cause. The passage goes on to say, “So that you will prove yourself to be blameless and innocent, children of God, above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.” How do we impact the generation in which God has called us? The answer is by letting God impact us first, by changing and growing ourselves. Many times the most powerful tool in a witnessing bag is a changed and changing life.

What’s the other side of the balance? It’s believing that God stands ready to work in and through you. That’s what empowers our work for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. That’s why we have so many godly mothers in our church family. It’s because their lives are examples of the sanctification process in action. That they’re working out their salvation and God is working in and through them. And at any given moment there’s no way to know who’s doing what. But the bicycle of their life is certainly moving forward at an aggressive pace in the right direction and as a result you see what the text says, “God is pleased. God is pleased by men and women who are allowing him to work out their salvation.”

Lastly, progressive sanctification is a blessing. It’s a blessing. It’s really interesting how the book of Philippians ends. Paul says, “You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel after I had left Macedonia no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone.” That’s what sanctified people do, “for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, I seek for the profit which increases to your account. I’ve received everything in full and have an abundance, I’m amply supplied having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God. And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus. Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

See when you have a group of people who are working out their own sanctification, working out their own salvation in fear and trembling, it's amazing the level of impact that God can help us have together.