

The Will and Sanctification

God's work and the believer's effort

PHILIPPIANS 2 | 2 PETER 1

True sanctification is more than outward behavior modification. God gives the believer a new heart, renews the mind, reorders the affections, and works within us both to will and to work. The believer truly chooses, strives, resists, obeys, and perseveres - but never independently of grace.

CENTRAL TRUTH

We do not work in order to be saved; we work because God has saved us and is at work within us. Grace neither makes obedience unnecessary nor leaves obedience to unaided human will.

1 God Works, Therefore We Work

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

Paul does not command believers to earn justification. To 'work out' our salvation means to bring its implications into lived obedience. Verse 13 supplies the foundation: God is already at work, providing both the willing and the working.

Personal, but Not Private

Paul's command is addressed to the church as a body. Each believer must respond in faith and obedience, but no believer is called to pursue sanctification alone. God forms a holy people whose shared obedience makes the transforming work of Christ visible.

BE AWARE OF THE ENEMY'S LIE

'This is your struggle, and you must overcome it alone.' The enemy twists personal responsibility into spiritual isolation. God works within His people as they encourage the weary, restore those who stumble, bear burdens, speak truth, and remind one another of grace. God not only supplies the power to obey; He also gives us a people with whom to obey.

- ? What tension do you hear between 'work out' and 'God works in you'?
- ? How does the corporate setting change the way you think about sanctification?
- ? When are you most tempted to believe that you must struggle alone?

Fear and Trembling

Paul is not teaching anxious uncertainty about whether Christ will preserve His people. 'Fear and trembling' describes humble seriousness before God - the opposite of presumption, self-confidence, and casual obedience.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

Justification is God's once-for-all declaration that the believer is righteous in Christ. Sanctification is God's continuing work by which the justified believer is progressively conformed to Christ. Obedience is evidence and fruit, never the ground of our acceptance with God.

2 Divine Provision and Diligent Effort

READ 2 PETER 1:3-11

Peter follows the same pattern as Paul: God provides what is necessary, the believer makes every effort, and growing Christian character supplies confirming evidence of God's calling.

- God provides what is necessary.
- The believer makes every effort.
- Growing Christian character supplies confirming evidence of God's calling.

Making one's calling and election sure does not cause election or secure an uncertain decision in God. The fruit of grace gives assurance and confirms God's work. Divine sovereignty includes the means God appoints - faith, repentance, obedience, perseverance, Scripture, prayer, and the fellowship of the church.

? What is the difference between effort that depends on grace and effort that attempts to replace grace?

? Why does God's provision make effort meaningful rather than unnecessary?

3 The Will and What Appears Most Desirable

Jonathan Edwards argued that the will does not choose independently of the person. We choose according to the strongest prevailing inclination - what appears most desirable - at the moment of choice.

Immediate comfort, approval, pleasure, anger, escape, or revenge may appear more compelling than what we know to be right. The problem is often not ignorance; it is disordered desire.

KEY CONNECTION

Sanctification reaches beneath conduct. As God renews the mind and reorders the heart's affections, what appears desirable begins to change. God works not only in the action but also in the willing that precedes it.

? Recall a time when you knew what was right but wanted something else more strongly. What desire was competing with obedience?

? How do Scripture, prayer, worship, fellowship, and practiced obedience reshape what we desire?

4 Three Errors That Produce Spiritual Passivity

SELF-RELIANCE

My effort is sufficient.
Transformation depends upon
determination, discipline, or
willpower.

FATALISM

My effort does not matter.
Human choices and appointed
means have no meaningful role.

ANTINOMIANISM

My obedience does not matter.
Grace is wrongly used to dismiss
God's moral law.

THE BIBLICAL POSITION

We are not saved by our obedience, but those who are saved are called and empowered to obey. Because salvation is entirely of grace, we cannot transform ourselves. Because God is working within us, our effort is neither independent nor meaningless. Obedience is not the price of salvation but a necessary fruit of it.

? Which error are you most inclined toward: trusting your discipline, excusing passivity as sovereignty, or treating obedience as optional?

? What would repentance look like in that area?

5 Spirit-Enabled Effort Is Still Effort

Spirit-enabled obedience is not necessarily effortless. The contrast is not between difficult willpower and easy grace. Self-reliant willpower attempts to overcome sin from the resources of the self; Spirit-enabled effort actively depends upon God as He renews the inner person and supplies power to obey.

Depending upon the Spirit does not mean waiting for desire to change before obeying. We pray, remember truth, flee temptation, seek accountability, and take the next obedient step, trusting that God is at work through those means.

? Where are you waiting to feel differently before taking the next obedient step?

? Which means has God already provided for you to use?

6 Personal Response: From Knowing to Willing to Doing

- Name the obedient action clearly. What has God commanded?
- Identify the competing desire. What appears more desirable in the moment?
- Replace the governing lie with biblical truth.
- Choose an appointed means: prayer, Scripture, avoidance, accountability, confession, restitution, or immediate action.
- Take one specific step within the next seven days.

PERSONAL COMMITMENT

Because God is at work in me, I will not excuse passivity or trust myself. By His grace, I will _____ this week.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

God is the source of both holy willing and holy working. The believer's effort is real, necessary, dependent, and never meritorious. Sanctification changes more than conduct, and although it is personal, it is practiced in fellowship. Grace opposes earning, not effort.

Closing Prayer

Father, apart from Your grace we cannot desire or perform what pleases You. Guard us from self-reliance, fatalism, and lawlessness. Renew our minds, order our affections, strengthen our wills, and teach us to obey with reverence and hope. Work in us for Your good pleasure. Amen.