

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Person and Power of God in Your Spiritual Growth

Scripture: Philippians 2:13

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Just let go and let God.

If you've been around the church for any significant time, you've probably heard someone offer that passive maxim as spiritual advice. In fact, many believers might use that as shorthand to describe the process of sanctification. It's the idea that God will do what He wants, when He wants, and believers are just along for the ride.

But the church's version of "Don't Worry, Be Happy" is in direct opposition to Scripture. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul describes the cooperative paradox of sanctification—that it is responsibility of man accomplished through the power of God.

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.

We've already discussed man's responsibility as described in verse 12. Now we need to examine God's role in our sanctification, a role that Paul unfolds by highlighting its five key attributes. We'll consider the first two today.

The Person of God

The first key to God's work in our sanctification is His personhood, which Paul emphasized in verse 13.

Most pagan deities are described as impersonal, remote, and indifferent. That is not surprising, because false gods are fabricated by men out of fear and superstition. Even those that have personal characteristics are not portrayed as desiring fellowship with their worshipers. And understandably, their worshipers have no desire to fellowship with them.

But the true and living God of Scripture is real and personal. The Bible does not try to prove that God is a person because it assumes that reality. In both testaments He is spoken of in anthropomorphic (human-like) terms, such as having eyes and seeing, of having ears and hearing, of having feet and walking, of loving and hating, weeping and laughing, condemning and forgiving. He thinks, feels, acts, and speaks—all elements of personhood. As a person, He has a personal concern for mankind, and especially for His children. That personal concern is seen in His work in believers.

The God of Scripture has unimaginable love for fallen, sinful mankind, which has rebelled against

Him, blasphemed Him, and vilified Him. He has such great love for them “that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:16-17). It is not the Lord’s will “for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

For those who belong to Him, the God of Scripture has even greater love and the closest of personal relationships. Throughout Scripture, God is referred to as His people’s Father—on a national level in the Old Testament (cf. Isaiah 63:16, 64:8), and individually in the New (cf. Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 9; 23:9). Adam and Eve, Moses, and many other Old Testament saints spoke with God directly. “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11).

The omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Creator and Sustainer of the universe loves His children with everlasting love and kindness. God protects them according to His everlasting covenant and promises. He forgives and cleanses with everlasting grace through His Son. And He calls, gifts, and empowers them by His Spirit for spiritual service with everlasting impact. He sanctifies and will glorify those whom He has justified, bringing them into His heavenly kingdom to live with Him for all eternity.

The Power of God

The second essential truth emphasized in Philippians 2:13 concerning God’s part in believers’ sanctification is His divine power. Above all else, it is God “who is at work” (Philippians 2:13) in the lives of His children. He calls them to obey, and then, through His sovereign power, energizes their obedience. He calls them to His service, and then empowers their service. He calls them to holiness, and then empowers them to pursue holiness.

“Work” is from the verb *energeō*, the source of the English word *energy*. God energizes His children to obey and serve Him; His power enables their sanctification. Believers can do nothing holy or righteous in their own power or resources. Just as no one can be justified by the work of the flesh (Romans 3:20), so no one can be “perfected [sanctified] by the flesh” (Galatians 3:3). Paul confessed that “by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

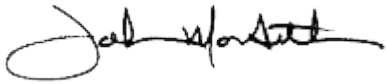
Paul did not underestimate the importance of faithful obedience. But he knew that underlying all acceptable service is the gracious power of God. It is “not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves,” he wrote, “but our adequacy is from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5). He reminded the Ephesians that he “was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to [him] according to the working of His power,” and rejoiced,

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:7, 20-21)

God Himself is the believer’s supreme and indispensable resource and power. The wonder of all wonders is that “it is God who is at work” (Philippians 2:13) in them. Paul summed it up in Colossians 1:29 when he said, “I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

It is for that reason that sanctification will continue throughout the believer's life (Philippians 1:6). Those whom God justifies He invariably sanctifies. He will accomplish His will by saving and preserving those who come to Him (John 6:40, 44).

The personal nature of our relationship with God, and the power available to us through that relationship help define how He works in us and through us to bring about our spiritual growth. Next time, we'll look at another aspect of His sanctifying work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

(Adapted from [*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*](#).)

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