

God at Work in You, Part 3

Philippians 2:13

50-21

Let's open our Bibles now to Philippians chapter 2. We're looking for the last time at verses 12 and 13, Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 and 13. It's part of our continuing study of this great epistle. As we approach the text, let me see if I can't give you some context in which to contain your thoughts this morning. Through the years, I have always been fascinated by the religions of the world. I can remember way back as a junior high student wanting to write a paper on the Buddhist world because I was so curious about false religion. Through the days of my college and seminary and ever since then, I've always had a fascination for false systems of religion.

One of the things that has become apparent to me over the years is that it is characteristic of the false gods of this world to be remote, transcendent, distant and impersonal. Most of those deities, frankly, are fabricated out of fear, since they are not true gods and since they do not truly exist. They are the invention of men. And since men live all their life long in bondage to the fear of death, they tend to be deities that are designed by men in fear. The Old Testament tells us that when men then design their deities, demons impersonate the deities that men have designed and do enough supernatural activity to keep men captive to the deities of their own design. But it is across the board common to the deities that men have invented in the great religions of the world that their deities are impersonal. And because their very invention is founded upon a fear factor, there is a no sense of longing on the part of the worshiper to have any kind of association with the deity. There is no cry in the heart to have fellowship with the deity. The deity is not portrayed as one who seeks any relationship with the creature. And so, gods are invented who for the most part are only appealed to on the basis of appeasement so that someone could avoid the inevitable death which they so greatly fear.

Perhaps this is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the religion of Hinduism which has locked up probably a billion people around the world. And in the teaching of Hinduism recorded in the Vedas which is the earliest of all the Hindu scriptures, the absolute creator God is given the name Brahman. That is the god that is the supreme deity, the deity from which everything flows in Hinduism. And maybe you'd like to know just a little bit about Brahman, or Brahma, whichever you would choose.

First of all, Brahman is not a person. Brahman is not a personal spirit but an abstract unknowable reality. Brahman is everywhere at all times but no one can see, touch, hear, taste, smell or experience the presence of Brahman. The Hindu scriptures tell us also that Brahman is unknowable and thus is unknown, and therefore all paths to the deity are imperfect paths, and all attempts to describe the deity are useless and vain. He is neither describable or it is neither describable or knowable. Brahman has no moral qualities. As best I can tell, Brahman has no qualities at all and how anything can exist that has no qualities is hard for me to understand. I will never forget as long as I live the sign I saw in the Hindu temple in Delhi which said, "God is attributeless." Brahman is nothing. There are no characteristics, no qualities and no attributes.

The Hindu scripture also teaches that Brahman is neither holy or unholy, loving or unloving, fair or unfair. And connected to that ephemeral and amoral entity called Brahman are two other sort of deities that are really the Hindu trinity. There is also Vishnu, called the preserver; and Shiva, called the destroyer. And out of those deities flow approximately 330 million other deities. The creator, Brahman, who is really the source of all of this, is utterly impersonal, utterly non-personal and flowing from him or it all the rest of the deities are likewise impersonal, non-personal, indifferent, set apart from the created world.

Now, what that means to a Hindu is that these deities, which supposedly have some will, which supposedly have some control and some preferences for the behavior of human kind, in no way are involved in assisting man to work out whatever it is that they're supposed to be doing. So, the bottom line is that Hindus, like all the other people in the false religions of the world, are left to sort out and work out their own lives without any help from any deity. The best you can do is appease the deity with the hope that the deity would not debilitate you or kill you, but certainly you don't cultivate a relationship with the deity in which you expect that he would assist you in working out the difficulties of your life.

Now, that is quite the opposite of the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is a person. The God of the Bible is a personal spirit. The God of the Bible is personally involved with His creatures. The God of the Bible seeks a personal relationship with men and women. The God of the Bible comes to live inside Christians where He takes up residence and abides. The God of the Bible finds deep satisfaction and joy in assisting the believer to do that which is His own will. So, Christianity really is separated from all of those other kinds of religions where the deities are utterly impersonal, detached, and where their assistance is neither required nor sought after.

The God of the Bible is just the opposite. He loves. He cares. He takes up residence in the life of the believer to effect in that believer's life that which is the very expression of His will. The God of the Bible is not an overbearing force, not a God of pagan making, not a God who makes demands on impotent people who are unable to comply and then crushing them because of their non-compliance. The God of the Bible is a loving, caring, personal God who makes demands on men that they can't fulfill, and thus comes to live in them to fulfill His own demands in the very men He demanded to fulfill them.

We as Christians then, distinct from the rest of the world, the religious world, have the amazing privilege of not only serving our God, but of having our God dwelling within us, of having an intimate relationship with the true God of the universe. He takes up residence with us and in us. We talk with Him. We hear Him speak. We experience the comforts and the encouragement and the guidance and the direction of His presence. The Old Testament declares that such a God is our God. When the Old Testament describes God, it describes Him in general as a person. And the best way that man knows as to understand a person is to give to that person human-like qualities. And we say that's anthropomorphic; that is, to speak of God in human terms. As one writer said, if you read the Old Testament you might conclude that God is come kind of a quote-unquote "magnificent human being," because the celebration of His personhood is put into terms which relate Him to man because He is so much of a relating God. For example, the Old Testament writers speak of God as talking, God as hearing, God as seeing, God as smelling, God as breathing. Even Isaiah 5 verse 26 speaks of God as whistling. They speak of God as having a heart. They speak of the face of God, the eyes of God, the ears of God, the nostrils of God, the hands of God, the legs of God, the feet of

God, the arms of God. They say He walks. He goes to war. They speak of His loving, and hating, and pleading, and condemning, and weeping, and laughing, and comforting, and caring. And all of that is to wrap up God in a package that is identified as personhood. God is a person. And so, He is described almost as if He were some magnificent human being. It is said that Moses spoke to God face to face. That Moses spoke to God mouth to mouth. In Exodus 33:11 it says, "Moses spoke to God as a man talks to his friend." Very personal, very intimate.

In Psalm 18 I think we find one of the most magnificent, majestic, and thrilling indications of God's personal involvement in the life of one of His own. Look with me to Psalm 18 because I believe this is a rich truth that ought to be captured in your heart and mind. In Psalm 18, picking up the text in verse 6, we find the psalmist in great distress. And in his distress he says, "I called upon the Lord." This is not a relationship of fear. This is a relationship of love and assistance. So, "He called upon the Lord and he cried to my God for help, he says. He heard my voice out of His temple and my cry for Him before Him came into His ears, my cry for help before Him came into His ears." Now, here is the psalmist in the midst of difficulty, trying to sort out and work out the vicissitudes of his own life. And he cries to God for help. And would you please notice the response: "Then, the earth shook and quaked. And the foundations of the mountains were trembling and were shaken because He was angry. Smoke went up out of His nostrils and fire from His mouth devoured, coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also and came down with thick darkness under His feet. And He rode upon a cherub and flew. And He sped upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him, darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him passed His thick clouds, hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. And He sent out His arrows and scattered them and lightning flashes in abundance and routed them. Then, the channels of water appeared and the foundations of the world were lay bare. At Thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils. He sent from on high, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me for they were too mighty for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity but the Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a broad place, He rescued me." And here is the main thought, "Because He delighted in me."

That's relationship. And here is a man who was related to God. And when that man cries out to God, the whole universe is in trauma as God acts in behalf of His one beloved child. That's the kind of God we have. Not an attributeless, indifferent non-entity, but a God who loves and cares to the point where He moves heaven and earth if need be to lift up one of His own beloved children.

In Psalm 56 and verse 8 it says the psalmist said that God put His tears in a bottle. The word for bottle there is the word for wineskin. A wineskin is a large container and the psalmist was saying God is so compassionate that He collects all my tears and keeps them in a wineskin. And it must have been a large one because the psalmist shed a lot of tears. What kind of God is it who collects the tears of His beloved children and keeps them as a memorial to their pain, and their sadness, and their sorrow? It is a compassionate God. It is a caring God, a loving God, a personal God, who though not simply a magnificent human being, can be spoken of in terms that convey His personal touch.

God is personal, and He has an abiding relationship with us, and we experience the fullness of it every day of our lives and good that we do. For if He was not working in us, we would be unable to work at all to His glory and His praise. In fact, all of the effort of verse 12, if you're looking at Philippians 2, all of the effort of verse 12 would be useless if it were not for verse 13. Remember

what verse 12 says, "So then, my brethren, or 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." That working out would be impossible if it were not for the fact that verse 13 says, "For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." And the wondrous balance of spiritual life and spiritual growth and sanctification is that is the Christian working out while God is working in. That is the perfect balance. It takes all of me, as we have seen, but it demands all of Him. And all of us alone would accomplish absolutely nothing.

But how wonderful that our God works in us to accomplish His own good pleasure, to effect that which He demands. That's the glory of Christian living, that God calls us to obey and then God effects that obedience in us. God calls us to holiness and then effects that holiness in us. God calls us to serve and then mobilizes that service in us by His own power and presence. Your spiritual growth, and your progress toward maturity, and your sanctification, and your moving toward Christ's likeness demands all that you are, but it also demands all that God is in you. And that is the uniqueness of Christianity, Christ in you: the hope of glory. God taking up residence in the believer. And that is how we live our Christian life.

Now, remember verse 12 talked about the Christian working out. And now, verse 13, we're going to talk about God working in. And as we look at verse 13, it seems like a simple statement, but it is loaded with profound truth. All it says is, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." I looked at that over and over again and it begin to dawn on me that there are at least five key truths about God there that we must understand, that will make this statement really come alive. God works in you, what a statement, what an incredible reality. God says, "Without Me you can do nothing, absolutely nothing." It is God who has to do it all. In John 15:4 Jesus said, "If you try to produce something, you must be connected to the vine, because if you don't abide in the vine, you have no life source to produce fruit, without Me you can do nothing." In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 as the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit outlines the matters of spiritual gifts and ministries, in verse 6 he says, "There are varieties of effects but the same God who works all things in all persons." Whatever is being produced in your life to His glory, He is producing. He is at work in you, in me, in all His children. That's why 2 Corinthians 3:5 says, "We are not adequate in ourselves but our adequacy is from God. He is at work in us." What a thought.

Now, I want you to concentrate on five elements of that thought. Very simple, and they all focus on the one who works in us. First of all, let's note His person, His person. It says in verse 13 it is God who is at work. It is God. Literally, the Greek says, "God is the one at work." No one else but God. The emphasis is on God. The absolutely unbelievable truth that the one who is at work in us is God, the very God who created the universe. He is that personal, that intimate, that concerned that He literally works in us. We are not dependent on our human resources, although God has given us much in terms of creation, and much in terms of redeemed creation to work with. We are still not dependent on our human resources. We are not even dependent on our brothers and sisters in Christ, though the body of Christ has a marvelous ministry to itself and we are in great debt to those who serve us in the body by the use of their gifts and through the fellowship and ministry which stimulates us to love and good works. Nor are we dependent upon the holy angels who are sent forth as ministering spirits with the very purpose of ministering to the children of God, Hebrews 1:14.

As wonderful as it is to have talents humanly, as great as it is to be a part of the body of Christ and to have angelic assistance, that's not going to do it. It isn't that we are dependent on human pastors and teachers who have taught us the Word of God, and fed us like sheep, and led us as shepherds.

As wonderful as that is, as blessed as it is to have those kinds of people ministering to us, the key to our spiritual progress is that God is the one at work in us. I'm grateful that there are other believers working on us. I'm grateful that there are angels working for us. I am grateful for pastors and teachers who are working, as it were, to shape us. But the thrill of all thrills is that it is God who is the one at work in us. God Himself is working out our sanctification.

That's why sanctification can't be deterred. The same God who justifies, who wrought justification, will bring about sanctification. There is an undeniable inevitability there. It is God who is the one at work. The immutable, unchanging glorious, sovereign, majestic, righteous, holy, gracious, merciful God; the God who rules all things and always accomplishes His will is never frustrated, always does what He desires. The God who is never thwarted, He is at work in us.

You see, that is what made the psalmist say in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd." That's where the emphasis ought to be. Not the Lord is my shepherd, but *the LORD* is my shepherd. There are a lot of shepherds in this world; the psalmist says the Lord is mine. God works in me, and that's why I shall not want, because He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul. Every need is met because the Lord is my shepherd. That's the great truth of Christianity. In Psalm 27, the psalmist says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation," then I love this, "the Lord is the strength of my life." The Lord is the strength of my life. His person, that's where Paul starts. It is God. That ought to be in bold type, underlined, with three exclamation points.

Unimaginable truth to a pagan world, unimaginable to say God works in you, God who loves us with an everlasting love, God who holds toward us an eternal kindness, God who keeps us with an everlasting covenant based on everlasting promises, God whose gifts and callings are without repentance, God who says that whom He justifies He glorifies, God who sees us through to the end, God who unendingly, unswervingly commits Himself to us to supply all our needs in Christ Jesus, that God is the one in us. He is the strength of our life, the God who made the world, the God who upholds the world by the word of His power, the God who is sovereign over everything for all eternity, He lives in us. That's really an astounding realization.

I love a little paragraph by WH Griffith Thomas. He says this, "God is the answer to every question of the mind, to every trembling fear of the heart, to every weakness of appetite and to every strong hurricane of temptation. The soul, the lonely individual soul not knowing whence it has come, knowing almost as little where it's going, confronting the question of weakness and sin and death and eternity and the deep, deep problems of moral evil can only answer every complaint by the one all sufficient, all comprehending monosyllable, God. This is our anchor. God made us. God knew our constitution. God knew our environment. God knew our temptation, the temptations that would assail us, and yet God redeemed us to Himself and made us His own by the blood of Christ. Now, if God be a being of perfect benevolence, He cannot have done so much without assuming to Himself the responsibility of realizing the object of the tears, longings and prayers which He has put by His own hand within our nature. And therefore, we must throw back on Him the responsibility of making us blameless, harmless and unrebukable before Him." End quote.

What a person living in us. And as Griffith Thomas rightly says, the God who made us and the God who made us His own must have assumed the responsibility of making us into what He wanted us to be. Who is it? God, in us.

Secondly, Paul reflects on His power, not only His person. He says it is God who is at work, *energeō*,

we get the word energy from it in the Greek. It means to put out power or to work effectively. To put it simply, it's the word "the energizer." God is the energizer. For it is God who is the energizer. He is the one whose power drives our sanctification. You see, in the flesh we can do absolutely nothing, but His power drives us toward Christlikeness. His power compels righteousness and controverts sin. That's why we are sustained. That's why we can say we are eternally secure in Christ. Why? Because His power continues to drive us to glorification. His power expels sin and invites holiness. We persevere because we are energized by Him. And how much power does He have? He has all power. He is the omnipotent God. Is there anything too hard for Him to do? He has all power. He committed that power to Christ and Christ said, "I have all power in heaven and in earth." And so, we have the tremendous realization that we are energized by God, and that there's no limit to His energy, and that if He saved us in order to sanctify us, then that will take place. He will move us along toward Christ's likeness. His energy will accomplish that. That's His promise.

And there is so much power available that Paul can say in Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that works in," what? "Us." Maybe it would have been more understandable if it had said, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think according to the power that works in heaven, or the power that works in Christ, or the power that works in the Holy Spirit, but the power that works in us." God can accomplish and does accomplish through you that which is unimaginable, unthinkable, beyond your ability to plan or reason or dream. He is effecting the sanctification process.

There is a certain sovereignty in that, in that there are differing points along the path where we all find ourselves. And we don't know all of God's reasons for some of the apparently convoluted trips that some are taking in the process, but nonetheless, it is my firm conviction that God effects sanctification in the life, that there is a pattern of progress which God is working to please Himself, as we shall note, and He is the power behind it. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," Paul says, Philippians chapter 4. Let me give you an illustration of this. Go back to 2 Chronicles chapter 29, and I want to show you an interesting moment in the history of God's people, Judah, and just give you a very good analogy to help you see this picture of how God works. Hezekiah became king; verse 1 says of 2 Chronicles 29, he was king of Judah. He was only 25 years old when he became king. And he reigned for 29 years in Jerusalem. Verse 2 characterizes his life, and it is a wonderful characterization. "He did right in the sight of the Lord according to all that his father David had done." He was a good king. He was a noble king. He was a godly man. Now, when he ascended to rule among the people of God, he deemed it essential that they get their spiritual lives together.

And so, he started at the top, and in the first year of his reign, verse 3, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. There had been a real ignoring of the things of God and the whole of the people of God had fallen into sin and idolatry, a tragic history. Here comes Hezekiah, a godly man, he opens the doors of the house of the Lord, he repairs them, he is reinstating worship and then he does this: he brought in the priests and the Levites, gathered them into the square in the east, all of those who were responsible for the religious leadership of the nation, he brought together. He said to them, "Listen to me, O Levites, consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry the uncleanness out from the holy place." Clean up this place and clean up your lives. A very direct, straight-forward approach. And he started with a religious leadership. He says, "Our fathers have been unfaithful and have done evil in the sight of the Lord our God, and have forsaken Him and turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord and have turned their backs. They have also shut the doors of the porch

and put out the lamps and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. Therefore, the wrath of the Lord was against Judah and Jerusalem and He's made them an object of terror, of horror, and of hissing as you see with your own eyes. For behold our fathers have fallen by the sword and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. Now, it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel that His burning anger may turn away from us."

So, then he says, "My sons, don't be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, to minister to Him and to be His ministers and burn incense." So, all the priests and all the Levites are gathered and told it's time for spiritual consecration. And they did it. They began it, verse 17 says, on the first day of the first month. And if you'll flow down to verse 20, after the consecration of the priests and the Levites, King Hezekiah rose early and assembled the princes of the city and went up to the house of the Lord. Now, he moves away from the religious leaders to the nationally recognized leaders, to the rest of the leaders. And he says it's time for you to get spiritually in tune with God, and it's time for you to make sacrifices and sin offerings. And there was a tremendous slaughter. And if you want to know the extent of this consecration, you need only go to verse 32, "And as the Levites and the priests had been set apart to God, now all the rest of the leaders are, the number of the burnt offerings which was brought was 70 bulls, 100 rams, 200 lambs, all these for a burnt offering and the consecrated things were 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep," this is a real massacre of animals. "And the priests were too few so that they were unable to skin all the burnt offerings, therefore their brothers, the Levites, helped them until the work was complete and until the other priests had consecrated themselves, for the Levites were more conscientious to consecrate themselves than the priests. And there were also many burnt offerings with the fat of the peace offerings and with the libations for the burnt offering, thus the service of the house of the Lord was established again. Then, Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over what God had prepared for the people because the thing came about suddenly." I mean, it was an instant revival.

Now, we've got the leadership taken care of. You come to chapter 30, follow this, "Hezekiah then sent to all Israel and Judah," now everybody, "and wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh also that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the Lord God of Israel." Now, he is really calling for the Passover to be reinstated in its fullness. It had been only minimally attended to in past years and he wants the whole nation there as God has prescribed. And this is really the work of God. God through Hezekiah is calling all the people. Verse 6, "The couriers were to say, O sons of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel." This is calling for a spiritual revival. Verse 8, "Do not stiffen your necks." Verse 9, "If you return to the Lord, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before those who led them captive and return to this land, for the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him." So, He's calling for revival.

Now, notice, here's the key, the couriers go out, verse 10, everywhere, and then you come down to verse 12. Follow this, "The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord." Isn't that interesting? Isn't that a fascinating statement? The king and the princes were commanding the people to return to God because it was the word of the Lord to them. God says command the people to return to Me, and then verse 12 says, then God gave them a heart to do it. Marvelous, isn't it? God therefore energizes the fulfillment of His own command, what a perfect model. God moves powerfully to produce what He demands. That is the incredible mystery of Christian living: that God is effecting in the believer what He is commanding to the believer. You say, "How do you understand that?" I don't understand

it except that it's simply stated. I cannot understand it. I cannot make a dividing line between what is God and what is me, and how much God can do if I cooperate, and how much He can't do if I don't. It is mystery. But it is clear in Scripture that whatever is to be done in my life in response to God's command, He must energize. He is strong. He is powerful. And His power works to effect what He commands.

Go back then to Philippians chapter 2 and let's look at a third very, very essential factor in understanding the one working in us. We saw, first of all, His person as God, His power, He is energizing all of our spiritual development. We go from His power to, thirdly, His presence, and this will touch on what we already said in the introduction. Verse 13, "For it is God who is at work in you." Oh, what a great statement. God in you. He's not working on you, He's not working for you, He is working in you. What a profound reality.

You remember in Acts 1:8 where Jesus said to the apostles, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you." When the Spirit of God took up residence, there was power. God lives in us in His Spirit. That great truth, I think, was particularly important for some reason to the Corinthian church, because Paul said it to them at least three times. In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 16 he says, "If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy and that is what you are." You're the temple of God, you're where God lives. What a thought. And then, he says in verse 17, "The temple of God is holy and that's what you are." Verse 16, "You're the temple of God." That's what you are, God lives in you. Verse 17 repeats the same thought.

Over in chapter 6 and verse 19 he says, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you whom you have from God." Now, in 1 Corinthians 3 he's speaking collectively; the church as a whole is the temple of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 he's speaking individually; every Christian as an individual believer is the temple of God. He lives in us as individuals so he lives in us collectively. And then, in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 6 and verse 16, Paul says this: "For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, I will dwell in them and walk among them and I will be their God." What a thought. God says I will never leave you or forsake you. God says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing," why? "The Lord is at hand." He's present, eminence.

Do you understand what the psalmist had in mind then when he said of God, "You compass my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways," Psalm 139 verse 3? God, You're always there. You're always there present in me; there is never a moment of your existence from the time you give your life to Christ until you meet Him face to face that God is not with you, that He is not there. You have His presence. That has negative connotation in 1 Corinthians 6. Paul says, "If you join yourself to a harlot, you join Christ to a harlot." You say, "Well, now is Christ in me or is God in me?" And the answer is yes. The Spirit of Christ is God. "Well, isn't the Holy Spirit in me?" The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. The Spirit of Christ is the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of God who is God. It's the same. It's God in the form of His Spirit dwelling in you. And always present, always supporting, always sustaining, always upholding, always supplying, always strengthening, always shielding, never out of His care, always producing, sanctifying effects in your life. That's why He gets all the credit, because He's doing all the work.

Romans 11:33, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments, and unfathomable His ways, for who has known the mind of the Lord or who became His counselor?" God is working independently. God is working in ways beyond

our ability to understand, ever and always consistently in us, caring for every need. His presence is infinite. His understanding is infinite. His wisdom is infinite. And He lives in us. He is holy, so He always does what's right. He is loving, so He's always concerned with our best. He is gracious, so He always forgives. He is merciful, so He always holds back the fullness of judgment. He is just, so He's always fair. He's generous, so He always gives more than enough. He's there. God is not afar off. God is not a long distance away, like the gods of the pagans. God is here, living in us.

And I'll tell you something, beloved, God would not go to the great extent to justify us to then leave us alone. Having begun in the Spirit we would not be perfected in the flesh, Galatians 3:3. So, having begun in the Spirit we are perfected in the Spirit. Having begun with the power of God, we are sustained with the power of God. Having been justified by the power of God, we are sanctified by the power of God. And He lives in us. And that is why I believe that the process cannot be, cannot be halted. Sin in our lives, somehow, some way, slows it down, but God effects the progressive work through blessing or through chastening. Hebrews 12 says sometimes He has to discipline us, but that is for us to partake of His holiness, to produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness. So, whether it's through blessing or chastening, He sustains His sanctifying work by His presence, moving us toward greater spiritual maturity. So, His person is power and presence.

Fourthly, Paul speaks of His purpose, and this is the heart of what I want you to grasp from the practical standpoint this morning. His purpose, what is it? Well, He's trying to produce something very specific in us. What is it? He is working in us both to will and to work, or to will and to do. Now, what does this mean? Well, that phrase "both to will and to work" is best noted as a reference to us, rather than to God. He is working in you to cause you to will and to work for His good pleasure. In other words, there are two things God wants to energize in us: our will and our work. Desire and deed; those are very vital, very basic.

First of all, let's talk about that idea of working in us to will. He wants us to will what is right, to want what is right, to desire what is right. So He works on our want, on our will, on our desires. You remember Psalm 110:3 which says we are made willing in the day of His power. When His power moves in us it makes us willing. He is working to cause us to will to do what is right. See, all behavior rises out of your will; it all rises out of your desire, your longing, your wants, your intent. In fact, that verb "to will" is *thelō*, it is the verb that means intent or inclination. One lexicon says it is a will that is an unimpassioned operation. I think that's the way he phrased it. In other words, it's not the desire of passion. It's not the desire of lust. It's not the desire or the whimsical desire of emotion. It is the unimpassioned will that is the studied designed planned intent. God wants to produce in us the proper intention, the proper inclination, the proper desire for what is right.

This is nothing new. You again can go back to the Old Testament. You might remember Ezra 1 verse 5, it says, "The heads of the fathers households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the Lord." God began by stirring up their will, stirring up their desire. That is part of God's energizing work. Over in chapter 7, that same idea is used in Ezra, verse 27, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart." God works in you on your will, to produce the intent, the inclination, the will to do what He desires. That's where He begins His internal work, working on your desires. Because, what you do and what I do is a product of what we desire. Remember Proverbs 21:1, the king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever He wishes. He takes your heart and He turns it to cause you to will what is right, to will what is good, to will what is His desire.

But how does He do it? How does He do that? Let me give you two factors, okay? Very important. I believe that there are two things God produces in you to move your will. One is holy discontent, H-O-L-Y, holy discontent. What does that mean? It simply means you're discontent with your holiness. There is a righteous discontent, not an unholy discontent, that's sin; but a holy discontent with the present spiritual state. In other words, God makes you dislike your present spiritual weakness. Have you ever experienced that? Paul put it this way, "O wretched man that I am," Romans 7:24. That's holy discontent. It's not being discontent with your circumstances in life or the conditions in which God has called you to live; it's being discontent with your sin. And I believe that the convicting work of God in your life is to stir up a holy discontent about your sin.

Do you ever get exasperated about your sin? Do you ever get to the place where you find tears in your eyes because you're so sick and tired of the same sin? You're so sick and tired of fighting the battles on the same front? That's a holy discontent that God is producing as He works on your will. He wants you to hate sin.

The second thing that He produces in working on your will is a holy aspiration. That's the flipside, a longing for something better, a longing for something purer, a longing for something holy, a longing for something righteous, a longing for something true, a longing to be like Christ, a longing to be godly, a longing to be virtuous, a longing to be victorious. And sometimes you're reading about a Bible character and your heart is filled with an aspiration to be like Paul, or be like Peter or be like John. Or sometimes you're reading a missionary biography and you feel so cheap and so shallow because the level of your dedication seems so low when compared with some of the great people God has used. And that becomes holy aspiration, holy discontent and holy aspiration.

And that's where it all starts. And I believe that's the work of God in you producing that. To put it simply, He produces a hatred of sin and a love of righteousness. That's why if you want to get in touch with whether a person's really a Christian or not, you can look at those two things. Do they hate their sin and love righteousness? Is there a holy discontent and a longing for something far more pure than what they are experiencing? That's the work of the indwelling God, the Holy Spirit moving on your will.

If you want to see a perfect illustration of it, look at Philippians chapter 3. And here you're going to see holy discontent and holy aspiration come together. Verse 12, Paul says, "Not that I've already obtained it," that is, already obtained spiritual perfection, already reached full knowledge of Christ, full expression of His power, complete fellowship in His sufferings, already conformed fully to His death, already having attained resurrection, no. Not as though I have attained or have already become perfect. No, he says. That's holy discontent. I haven't become perfect. Verse 13, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet." I'm not there. That's holy discontent. That's why he says in verse 10, "I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death, I'm not there yet." That's holy discontent.

But look at holy aspiration in verse 12. "But I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Verse 13, "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind what is a part of that holy discontent and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Holy discontent, I'm not there, I haven't arrived. Holy aspiration, I press on, I press on. Now, that's what God wants to work in your will so that you will that which is right by having a revulsion toward what is wrong and an aspiration to what is right.

So, the purpose of God is to work on your will. But secondly, He works in you, energizing you both to will and then to work, or literally to do. And it's the word *energeō* again, the same word translated work here. He energizes you to be energetic. He energizes you, He works in you, so you will work, not just to will but to work, godly behavior. You start with a holy discontent, and that leads to holy aspiration, and that leads to holy resolve which means I will now do what is right, and that leads to holy work. That's the process. That's the process. Holy discontent, holy aspiration, holy resolve where the commitment is made produces holy work. And that's what God's doing in you. He's working on your will, and He's working on your work so that you will and do what is right. What a great promise, beloved. God is at work in us. Remember that little sign that you saw a few years ago, "Please be patient. God is not finished with me yet?" Great truth in it. The underlying truth is that God is at work in us. And only God can energize spiritual ends, spiritual results.

So, we see His person, His power, His presence, His purpose, lastly His pleasure. This is overwhelming. This is just mind boggling. Why is God doing this? The end of verse 13, "For His good pleasure." Do you understand that when you will and work what is right it pleases God? Do you understand that there is so much of a relationship between you and God that you can, in a sense, bring Him pleasure? The word *eudokia* means satisfaction. God works in us to will and to work for His good pleasure. He wants to cause us to do what pleases Him. That's what it means. He wants to cause us to do what satisfies Him. The underlying thing that strikes me is that anything that I could do could satisfy Him. Isn't He ultimately and infinitely and perfectly satisfied already? There's some way in which He takes pleasure in me willing and working on His behalf.

Do you remember Luke 12:32? Jesus looked at that motley bunch of weak-faith disciples and said, "It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Isn't that an astounding statement? You would have understood it if He had said, "Well, the Father has given in and decided He'll give you the kingdom anyway, but He's upset about it." No. It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. He is a God of love. He is a God of compassion. He is a God of grace and mercy, and you are very dear to Him. And when you will and work what He wants, He is pleased. And isn't that the essence of a relationship? To give to one another so that there is pleasure. He wants your best because your best is what pleases Him most. He takes pleasure in you. He takes pleasure in me. And what He wants to produce in us is for His own satisfaction.

Isn't it a great thought to think that I can bring satisfaction to the heart of God? Think about that. John MacArthur, you can do something, you could will something, you could be the kind of person who could bring satisfaction to the heart of God. Listen, I couldn't do that in my flesh. But God can work in me to will and to work what will be to His pleasure. I don't know about you, but I think the most wonderful thing about any relationship is that you would bring the other person pleasure, don't you? What good is a relationship if all you bring is pain? Who needs it? If all you bring is grief. But what everybody wants out of a relationship is satisfaction and pleasure. And God says you can bring Me that. Wonderful thing that Paul is saying here. The Christian is working out with maximum effort and God is working in to accomplish His pleasure.

Listen, let me bring it to a conclusion. We, of all the people on the face of this earth, are so uniquely blessed because God works in us. What a thought. That's the distinctiveness of Christianity. And that's the balance. It takes all of us and all of Him. A person who is being renewed by the Spirit of God is not in a state of passive surrender, but is actively engaged in serving and working and putting on the new man and killing the flesh. The Christian life is described as a race, and as a warfare, as a

fight. We are called on to be careful to apply ourselves to good deeds, Titus 3:8. It is said that the devil is an enemy to be resisted, James 4:7. We are to constantly beat our bodies into subjection, lest we would be disqualified in spiritual service. And we are told when it even when it comes to rest in Hebrews 4:11 that we are to strive or agonize to enter into rest. It takes everything you are as a Christian, everything you are. You're not just a passive piece of clay. It is not just "let go and let God." It is look carefully how you walk, Ephesians 5:15.

TC Hammond could summarize it well in this brief statement. "While the New Testament emphasizes most emphatically that the work of grace is of God and not of our inherent capacity, and so far lends support to the Quietist position, it is equally emphatic on the fact that God works in us or with us and thus does justice to the truth resident in Pietism. By combining both ideas, it corrects the errors resident in both." You remember where we started all this? The Quietist says "do nothing." The Pietist says "do everything." God says, "You do everything, and I'll do everything, and we'll effect sanctification."

As we close, let me ask you a question, real personal one, only you can answer. God is at work in you right now if you're a Christian. What is He working to cause you to will and to do? Have you thought about it? What does He want you to will? What does He want you to do? What habit does He want you to change? What relationship does He want you to make right? What relationship does He want you to break? What relationship does He want you to make? What attitude does He want you to change? What desire does He want you to ignore? What desire does He want you to have? What ministry does He want you to do? What spiritual duty does He desire that you will? And what area does He want you to be faithful? What wrong does He want you to make right? He's working in you to cause you to will and to work what will please Him. Do you know what it is that He wants you to will and to work?

Let's bow in prayer and ask the Lord: Lord, what is it that You are working in me to will and to do? What do You want me to want? What do You want me to desire? What do You want me to long for? What do You want me to do? What work do You want me to work? Show me. Father, hear that prayer of every praying heart for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).