

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

The Gravity of Sin

Scripture: Philippians 2:12–13

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Christians are not meant to be spectators in the sanctifying process. Believers are commanded to strive against their flesh for the sake of holiness and spiritual growth. At the same time, true righteousness is only possible through the power of God. As we've seen in recent days, biblical sanctification is a cooperative work between the Lord and His people.

The apostle Paul spells out the paradoxical nature of that cooperative work in Philippians 2:12-13.

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.

Paul's exhortation to the Philippians—and to *us*—suggests five vital truths that inform and encourage true spiritual growth. We've already considered how our sanctification is influenced by understanding Christ's love for and example to us, the need for obedience, and our responsibility to the Lord. Today we'll discuss the last of Paul's vital truths: the gravity of sin.

The Fear of the Lord

Although God is loving, merciful, and forgiving, He nevertheless holds believers accountable for disobedience. Like John, Paul understood well that “if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9).

Knowing that he serves a holy and just God, the faithful believer will always live with “fear and trembling.”

An important Old Testament truth is “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10; cf. Proverbs 1:7, 9:10). It's not the fear of being doomed to eternal torment, nor a hopeless dread of judgment that leads to despair. Instead, it's a reverential fear, a holy concern to give God the honor He deserves and avoid the chastening of His displeasure. It protects against temptation and sin and gives motivation for obedient, righteous living.

Such fear involves self-distrust, a sensitive conscience, and being on guard against temptation. It necessitates opposing pride, and being constantly aware of the deceitfulness of one's heart, as well as the subtlety and strength of one's inner corruption. It is a dread that seeks to avoid anything that would offend and dishonor God.

Believers should have a serious dread of sin and a yearning for what is right before God. Aware of their weakness and the power of temptation, they should fear falling into sin and thereby grieving the Lord. Godly fear protects them from wrongfully influencing fellow believers, compromising their ministry and testimony to the unbelieving world, inviting the Lord's chastening, and from sacrificing joy.

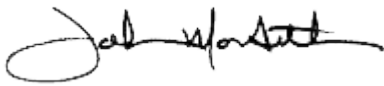
Comprehending Sin's Consequences

To have such godly fear and trembling involves more than merely acknowledging one's sinfulness and spiritual weakness. It is the solemn, reverential fear that springs from deep adoration and love. It acknowledges that every sin is an offense against a holy God and produces a sincere desire not to offend and grieve Him, but to obey, honor, please, and glorify Him in all things.

Those who fear the Lord willingly accept the Lord's correction, knowing that God "disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). This fear and trembling will cause believers to pray earnestly for God's help in avoiding sin, as the Lord taught them: "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver [rescue] us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). That prayer again reflects the spiritual tension that exists between believers' duty and God's power.

The true believer understands the consequences of his sin—that it sorely grieves the Lord and severely impedes his own growth. That truth, combined with the love and example of Christ, the need for obedience, and the responsibility the Christian has to the Lord, spurs him on to, as the apostle Paul wrote, "work out" his salvation.

And that's where we'll pick it up next time.



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

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