

# Working Out Your Salvation

## The Wonder and Mystery of Sanctification

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January 8, 2017

### Part 2- Joyful Obedience

#### Philippians 2:5-13

**5** Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,  
**6** who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
**7** but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men.  
**8** Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.  
**9** For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,  
**10** so that at the name of Jesus *EVERY KNEE WILL BOW*, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
**11** and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.  
**12** 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;  
**13** for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

Now this is the second Part of the new Series on "The Wonder and Mystery of Sanctification" that we are exploring as we begin the new year of 2017. And you will recall that last week we began this series in an Introduction by examining just what Sanctification is and how it is accomplished in our lives by looking closely at what the Apostle Paul was talking about when he said:

**12 ... work out your salvation with fear and trembling;**  
**13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.**

And we also found out last week that Sanctification is the life-long “process” that begins at the very moment we are justified, and it extends all the way to the moment of our death where we are becoming “holy”, or distinct, from the lost pagan world by being “set apart” *for* God and for God’s *use* and to God’s Glory.

And we saw that it is during this process where we are systematically changed into the very Image and Likeness of Jesus Christ, where we are constantly being transformed through things that God sovereignly *allows* that we would call “evil”, and through things that God sovereignly *causes* that we would call “good” into Christ-likeness and a place where we may share in *His* Holiness.

But, today I want to begin to examine the correlation between our *duty* to obey God and our *love* for God, between our *obligation* to follow after Jesus and the *joy* that comes from following Him, and between our *responsibility* to reject the lusts of our flesh and our *delight* in dying to self and living to the Lord Christ.

And so, this is simply another effort to examine what Paul meant in those two verses that Brother Andy just read to you. And I want to begin that examination this morning by asking a very serious question: “Is there a *duty* to love God?” In Christianity, is there a *responsibility*, a *command*, an *obligation* to love God? And the answer is “Yes!” For example, in **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** the infallible Word of the living God says:

**4 Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!**

**5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**

Now many of us are very familiar with this passage. It is called “The Shema”, and it is the foundation of the many Absolute Truths that are found in the Bible, including the Doctrine of the Trinity, and the entire concept of “Mono-theism” which is the worship of a single God, as opposed to “Poly-theism” or the worship of many “gods” that is carried out by the pagan world. In fact, part of what it means to be “pagan” in the first place is thinking that there is more than one God. All cultures throughout time and throughout the world that acknowledge and worship more than one god are “pagan” by definition.

But, notice verse 5 carefully. We have read this so many times that we might not pick this up. This first part of this verse says:

## **You shall love the Lord your God...**

And the word that was translated into English here as “**shall**” comes from the Hebrew word that is an imperative command. So, God’s people are *commanded* to love God. We are *told* to love God. We are *ordered* by God Himself to set our affections on Him.

But this goes much further than being “told” to love. We are also told *how* to love, and to what *extent* to love. We are told *how much* we are to love God. Verse 5 goes on to say:

**... with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**

Simply loving God on *some* level is *not* what is commanded here. Loving God *partially* or loving Him *haphazardly* or loving Him *inconsistently* or loving Him in any way other than *totally*, and loving God totally *all the time*, is unacceptable.

So, we are “ordered” and “commanded” and “held accountable” to love God “better” and “more” and “deeper” and “more profoundly” and “to a larger degree” than we love anything else. And later in the New Testament, Jesus elaborated even further into what Moses said here by adding yet another quality or measurement to the extent that we are commanded to love God when He said:

### **Mark 12:30**

***AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'***

So, in addition to being commanded to love God with every fiber of our hearts, and with every inch of our souls, and with every available degree of human ability, Jesus said that we are to bring every mental capacity to bear into this as well.

But it doesn’t even stop there because with this Command to love God comes terrible consequences if we do not. There are unthinkable repercussions on the person who does not love God. God has promised terrible things to those who do not enjoy Him and who do not take delight in Him. Those people will be damned forever in hell. So, not only are we *commanded* to love God, and not only are we *commanded* to

love God *totally* and *all the time*, and not only are we *commanded* to love God "higher" and "deeper" and "longer" and "better" than anything else, there is Divine Judgment promised to the one who doesn't.

Now, on the surface, this verse seems to be a terrible contradiction of terms. Because how do you *command* love? How do you *order* joy? How do you *expect* delight? Isn't love supposed to be "free"? Isn't love supposed to flow naturally out from our hearts? Isn't love supposed to be wonderful and sweet rather than a duty and an obligation and a command? And the answer to that question is "yes". Love *must* be free and un-coerced and unobligated, and it must flow out from our hearts, or it isn't love.

But, as we ponder this, we must understand that we are fallen creatures. And, as sinners, we do not normally or naturally love God or the things of God. And so, we need God to command us to love Him. And so, the way to look at this is to see God's Command to love Him fully and perfectly and constantly is the Call to be saved, because only saved people can love God like this. Saved people have been given the gift of love that God has for Himself. And the result is that all truly saved people love God.

But then, Jesus muddied the waters even more when He said in **John 14:15**:

**If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**

So, love is defined here by Jesus as obedience. And that is because love is invisible, it is a derivative of our hearts. You can't actually see love. You can't taste love. But you can see the *results* of love. And to God, love looks like obedience to what He said. So, if we say that we love God, we obey God. The Apostle John made this connection when he said this in **1 John 2:4-6**:

**4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;**

**5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:**

**6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.**

So, according to the Bible, us loving God looks like obedience to what God has said. So, the equation looks like this:

Obedience *to* God = Love *for* God

So, no matter how hard the people of the modern Church try to separate Obedience *to* God from Love *for* God, you simply cannot do it. And that means that where there is no obedience to that which God has spoken in His Word, there is no love for the God Who spoke it. And where there is love for God, there is always obedience.

Now, when I speak of obedience, I don't mean *sinless* obedience, or obedience *without fault* or *perfect* obedience. But, I do mean *honest* obedience which is an ongoing, truthful, consistent, *striving* to obey. So, our obedience should look like this:

We constantly and consistently struggle against the lusts of our flesh, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, to be humbly and joyfully submitted to the Authority of the Holy Scriptures in our daily life, all to the Glory of God

... and that struggle is what is called "Sanctification", or being made holy. So, while our effort to obey isn't always successful, it must *always* be a struggle. To cease from struggling against the multitude of fleshly and carnal lusts that war against our soul is to be *guaranteed* for temptation, and the "pull of the world" to overpower whatever love we may have for Jesus, and for sin to gain the upper hand, and that is *not* being holy.

But notice that we do not merely struggle in our own human "will power", or by simply putting forth more "effort", but that we struggle "in" or "by" the Power of the Holy Spirit. And that means, by default, that we will have more success over the lusts of our flesh than failure, and we have more victory than defeat. Please turn with me to read what the Apostle Paul said about this in **Galatians 5:13-26**:

**13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.**

**14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**"**

- 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.**
- 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.**
- 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.**
- 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.**
- 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,**
- 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,**
- 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**
- 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**
- 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**
- 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**
- 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.**
- 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.**

Now this is what Sanctification looks like. This is also what “serving God” looks like. And this is what “walking in (by) the Spirit” looks like. And this is what “being spiritual” looks like. And this is what “bearing godly fruit” looks like. But, notice what Paul wrote in verse 17:

**For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.**

Look closely at the first part of that verse again:

**For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...**

Now the Bible says here that our flesh has “desires”. And this English word comes from the Greek that means: that which is longed for; a craving; a love. So, inherent in our fallen flesh are certain “loves”, certain “cravings”, and things that are “longed for”. And when you put them together, they are called the “desires of the flesh”, or the “lusts of the flesh”. They could also be called “the loves of the flesh”, or “that which our flesh enjoys”, or “that which our flesh delights in”. They are the things that our unsaved, unregenerate, corrupt, rebellious, sinful, fallen flesh *wants*. And Paul lists *some* of them for us in verses 19-21:

- ✓ **Immorality** (public sexual sins)
- ✓ **Impurity** (private sexual sins)
- ✓ **Sensuality** (motivated by the flesh)
- ✓ **Idolatry** (covetousness/loving money)
- ✓ **Sorcery** (manipulating people for personal gain)
- ✓ **Enmities** (long standing feuds/unforgiveness)
- ✓ **Strife** (argumentative)
- ✓ **Jealousy**
- ✓ **Outbursts of anger**
- ✓ **Disputes** (arguments over insignificant issues)
- ✓ **Dissensions** (strong disagreement resulting in separation)
- ✓ **Factions** (separating into cliques)
- ✓ **Envy**
- ✓ **Drunkenness**
- ✓ **Carousing** (loose living)

Now the reason I say that this is a *partial* list is because the Apostle wrote down the next phrase in verse 21 that says:

**... and things like these ...**

... which means anything that is *similar* to the things he listed here. And then he tells us what is wrong with these things:

**... those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

So, these are attributes of people who are unsaved, those who are unconverted and unregenerate. So, the things listed here and the things that are “like” or that are “similar” to the things listed here are

what being lost and unsaved looks like. So, this is the fruit of being lost. So, another definition of being lost is:

Being *dominated* by what your flesh loves.

But then look at what he says again in verse 17:

**... and the Spirit against the flesh ...**

... and the way this is written shows us that in *addition* to the flesh having "desires" and "cravings" and "loves" and things "longed for", the indwelling Holy Spirit does, too. There are "loves" and "desires" that the Holy Spirit has, and Paul listed some of these godly and holy loves for us as well in verses 22-23 :

- ✓ **Love**
- ✓ **Joy**
- ✓ **Peace**
- ✓ **Patience**
- ✓ **Kindness**
- ✓ **Goodness**
- ✓ **Faithfulness**
- ✓ **Gentleness**
- ✓ **Self-control**

And then Paul described an amazing dynamic that is at work between the "loves" and "desires" of the flesh, and the "loves" and "desires" of the Spirit. He said:

**... these are in opposition to one another ...**

Paul said in verse 17 that the "desires" and "loves" and "cravings" of the flesh are "**in opposition**" to the "loves" and "cravings" and "desires" of the Spirit. Now, the phrase "**in opposition**" means: to be actively opposed to something or to be hostile to something or to confront something. So, the "loves" and "desires" and "cravings" of the Spirit and flesh are not simply in *disagreement* with each other, they are actively *opposed* to one another, they are *hostile* to each other, and they *confront* one another.

And this means that the “loves”, “desires”, and “cravings” of the Spirit have *nothing* in common with the “loves” and “desires” of the flesh. They promote entirely opposite agendas. And they are fed by completely different qualities. And this also means that there is no “common ground” between them, no “middle ground”, no “common denominator” on which they could agree.

And this Reality has the effect of saying that we are *either* engaging in the desires of our flesh *or* we are engaging in the desires of the Spirit, because we cannot do both. And that is the same thing as saying, “*We are either saved or lost, we are either born again or we are yet in our sins, we are either being led by God’s Spirit or we are being driven by our fleshly lusts*”.

And so, we are *either* feeding the desires and cravings of our flesh, *or* we are feeding and nourishing and promoting the loves and desires of the Spirit, but we simply *cannot* do both. And verse 24 says:

**Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

.. and this ongoing process of “putting to death” or “crucifying” the unregenerate flesh with its passions (loves) and desires is called “Sanctification”.

So, we must understand that everything we do, everything we are a part of, everything we read, everything we sing, everything we listen to, everything we watch, everything we agree with or reject, everything is either feeding and nourishing and promoting and encouraging the loves and desires and cravings of our flesh, or they are feeding and nourishing and promoting the loves and desires of the Spirit. And then, Paul puts a cap on this Truth by making a very profound statement:

**... so that you may not do the things that you please.**

Now back in 1826, the French physician and nutritionist, Anthelm Brillat- Savarin said:

“Tell me what you eat and I’ll tell you what you are.”

... and that is not only true in the nutritional world, but it is also true in the spiritual realm as well. It matters what you believe. And it matters what you embrace and what you love, and it matters what you feed your soul on. You simply cannot waltz through life being naïve about the effect that what you do, and what you allow yourself to be a part of, and what you pour into your mind through your eyes and ears, and what you embrace has on your eternal soul. If you feed on the world, you will be “worldly” or “of the world”. And, if you are worldly, then the loves and desires and cravings of the flesh will *overpower* your love for Jesus, and you will engage in the list of things that Paul said were:

### **the deeds of the flesh**

But if you feed on the things that are in concert with the loves and cravings of the Spirit, you will be “spiritual”. And look what Paul said that spiritual people do in verse 24:

**Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

But, once again, we have created a bit of a problem. Because left right here, we are defining *the* single most heartfelt *experience* that any human can ever possess, *only* in terms of “action” and “duty” and “responsibility” and “obligation” rather than in terms of “love” and “delight” and “joy”. So, we are very narrowly defining love by what we “do” and how we “act” and how we “carry ourselves” in Jesus’ Name and for His Glory, rather than how we “feel” or what we “experience” in our saved condition in Jesus.

And the reason this is dangerous is because our “action” and our “doing” and our “service” can be faked. Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 7:22-23:**

**22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'**

**23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; *DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.*'"**

Because we are fallen creatures, we can engage in amazing and even *commendable* religious activities, and yet never be truly born again. But while outward obedience can be untrue, inward experience isn't. The inward Reality is either there or it isn't. So, in the case of Sanctification, how we "feel" about God is at least as equally important as anything that we "do" for God. Therefore, it isn't the "doing" that is a priority, but "why" we do what we do.

Listen to the language that the Bible uses to describe this process of progressive Holiness that we are engaged in after we are saved, because it is very curious. And it sounds like this:

**Matthew 5:6**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

**Psalm 42:1b**

**... As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God.**

**Song of Solomon 3:1-3**

**1 On my bed night after night I sought him Whom my soul loves; I sought him but did not find him.**

**2 I must arise now and go about the city; In the streets and in the squares I must seek him whom my soul loves.' I sought him but did not find him.**

**3 The watchmen who make the rounds in the city found me, *And I said, 'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?'***

These are all "internal realities", not outward religious acts. And I think it is interesting that Sanctification is described in the Bible *not* in the various specific "acts" or "accomplishments" or "deeds" that we do, not even in the religious deeds we do, but in the disposition of the heart. Jonathan Edwards referred to this as "affections of the heart" and he said it is the motivation for all genuine sanctification. And I think this is an area where many of us have completely missed the boat concerning the ongoing Wonder and Miracle of Sanctification.

Because this means that Sanctification is *more* than simply something that the Bible "describes" and more than something that we are to "believe in" and "do". It means that Sanctification is *more* than a

list of activities that we are to obey. It also means that Sanctification is something that we must “experience” on a personal level:

1. An unquenchable “Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness”.
2. An ongoing “soul-panting” for God and His Ways.
3. A relentless “search” to be near God.

Hear what the Apostle Paul said about this in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

**Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**

Now, the first part of this verse that talks about being a “**new creature**”, or a “**new creation**”, is the “Regeneration” part. This is the miracle of Grace where God the Holy Spirit, Who is the Giver of Life, comes to you as a lost person, *before* you ask for it and *before* you even want it, and He *interrupts* your plans and He *inserts* Himself into your life, and He *imposes* God’s Will onto your life, and He *violates* your will. And, *all by Himself* (sovereignly), God the Holy Spirit “opens your blind eyes” and He “unstops your deaf ears” and He “takes out of the stony heart and gives you a heart of flesh”, and He gives you the Gift of Faith.

This is the glorious moment where you, as a spiritually dead sinner, are sovereignly given new “Spiritual Life”. This is the sovereign Act of God in transforming you from being lost to being Born Again.

And with those new eyes (that were sovereignly given to you), you “see” and understand the Gospel. And with those new ears (that were sovereignly given to you), you hear the “Call” of Jesus to repent, and with that new heart (that was sovereignly given to you), you believe the Gospel and put all your faith and all your hope and all your trust in Jesus Personally and in His finished Work. And God forgives you of all transgressions and He credits to you the very Righteousness of Jesus Christ, and you are “Justified”. And the result of all of this is you are a “**new creature**”. But now look again at the last part of this verse:

**... the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**

This is the Sanctification part. The only reason that “old things passed away”, and the only reason why “new things have come” is

because you have already been Born Again and already become Justified, and now the process of becoming Holy is already working in your life. So, "old things" passing away and "new things" coming on you doesn't mean that you are taller than you used to be, or that you are better off financially than you used to be when you were lost; it is describing the "newness" of spirit that you now have by being Born Again, and the "newness" of life that you are experiencing by walking and living in God's Kingdom.

So, when the New Testament talks about saved people being "free", or when the New Testament talks about the "liberty" that we have in Christ, it isn't talking about being "free" in the sense of being "autonomous" or "self-governing". This Truth is *not* what the famous "motivational speakers" who masquerade as Preachers and Teachers of the Gospel on the Hay, Wood, and Stubble Television Network talk about so much. They are false prophets. They are shysters who operate to fleece the sheep and make merchandise of the people of God. These charlatans are modern pied-pipers promising things that are not true and things they cannot possibly deliver. And sadly, weak and undiscerning people follow them and give them their money because this kind of sensual pep talk is intoxicating to their unconverted flesh.

The "freedom" and "liberty" described in the Bible is *not* that Jesus came and died for you so now you can fulfill all your dreams and have a better life down here. No. Jesus died for you to *rescue* you from the Wrath of God that was bearing down on you precisely because you were a wicked sinner in line for His Judgment. This is talking about being set "free" from sin so that you may now die to self and die to personal ambition and die to the world so you are free to now pursue Biblical Holiness. It is teaching us that Christ has given us "liberty" from oppressing sins and evil dispositions so that we may now grow in Grace and in the Knowledge of God so we can obey Jesus and follow after Him. And that is what Paul meant when he said this in

**Philippians 2:13:**

**for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.**

And I suggest to you that if God is working in your life, you should be able to talk about it and describe it in very good detail. Because you

can talk about what is important to you. You can discuss what God is doing in you. You can converse about how your loves and desires are changing and what you are praying about and what you are struggling to obtain.

Now keep in mind that Sanctification *always* follows genuine Regeneration. It is automatic. If you have been Born Again, you *will* be Justified. And if you have been Justified, you *will* enter the process of Sanctification. There is no such thing as somebody being saved and not being Sanctified. There is no such thing as somebody being Born Again and not pursuing Holiness.

And it is being in this marvelous process of Sanctification that is the result of being truly "born from above", that creates in us this *insatiable* "hunger and thirst" for Righteousness, this *ongoing* "craving" to be in God's Presence, and this *unquenchable* "panting" after God and the things of God.

And what happens is that as the newly saved person begins to read and study the Bible, and as he begins to pray, and as he begins to fellowship with other believers, he begins to grow in the Grace and in the Knowledge of God. And when a person is growing in Grace and Knowledge, that means he is understanding and believing and trusting in Divine, Absolute Truth.

And when a person understands and believes and trusts in what God said, he changes. He stops doing things that bring God no Glory, and he starts doing things that honor His Savior. He ceases activities that promote sin and that encourage rebellion and that feeds carnality, and he engages in activities that advance Godliness and Purity and Biblical Holiness.

So, this goes way beyond merely belief. It begins to be a part of his own earthly experience. For example, understanding and believing and trusting Divine Truth begins to affect the way that person lives his life, it alters the way he sees the world, it transforms the way he understands his own existence, the way he handles money, the way he raises his children, and what he will and will not allow to exist in his own life.

And suddenly "Right" and "Wrong" become clear to the believer. That which is "Good" and that which is "Evil" is no longer hidden from his eyes. And there is a clear distinction between that which is "Holy"

and that which is “Profane”. This is the experience of being made Holy, or the process of Sanctification.

But, here is where I think we get off base. Because as these radical changes begin to take shape in our lives, our ongoing walk with God, in other words, our pursuit of Holiness, quickly *descends* into little more than duty and obligation and responsibility. We become accustomed to the notion that “doing” certain things and “not doing” many more is what makes us holy, rather than the ongoing Work of Grace that God is doing inside of us. And so, Sanctification is then basically defined as checking off the list of things we are supposed to do, like Bible Study, Prayer, and Church Attendance while avoiding the many, many things that we see as being sinful. In fact, in many cases, a believer’s life is defined more by what he *doesn’t* do than what he actually does.

And so, we grow accustomed to the idea that we need to obey God. And “growing in the Knowledge of God” seems to feed into that notion. And last week we saw that the Apostle Peter said in **2 Peter 3:18** that we are to grow in the Knowledge of Jesu Christ. So, the more we learn about Jesus, the more glorious He becomes in our minds. And so, “Who Jesus is” becomes the motivation for our obedience. We obey Jesus because He is worthy of our obedience. We follow after Jesus because He deserves that. We do what Jesus says because He is entitled to that and He has earned that. And that sounds real good. It even sounds godly and biblical.

But the point I am making this morning is that I don’t think that is Biblical at all. In fact, I don’t even think it is obeying what Peter was teaching. Because **2 Peter 3:18** doesn’t just say that saved people are supposed to “grow in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ”. Please turn with me to **2 Peter 3** and let’s begin in verse 17. It says:

### **2 Peter 3:17-18**

**17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,**

**18 but 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.**

Now again notice what verse 18 says:

**... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ...**

... and last week, I asked you a question. I understand how we are to grow in the knowledge of Jesus. We do that by reading and studying the Bible, and through Prayer and by godly Fellowship, and by hearing solid teaching about Jesus and Who He is and what He has done. And the accumulation of all of that will allow us to grow in the knowledge of Jesus.

But how do we grow in the Grace of Jesus Christ? We're not in charge of Grace. We don't distribute Grace. We are the *recipients* of Grace. The Giver of Grace is God. So, how do we grow in the Grace of Jesus? What does growing in the Grace of Jesus look like? One of the earliest Reformed Catechism's asked the question:

What is the chief duty of Man?

And they answered this question by saying:

“The chief duty of Man is to know God; to love God; and to enjoy Him forever”<sup>1</sup>

Now, when I first read that, I was literally stunned. *Why* did they say that? I can understand why is the chief duty would be to “know” God. That makes perfect sense to me. That is what we have been talking about. The more I understand about Jesus through reading and studying the sacred Scriptures, the easier and better my obedience becomes. So, I believe what the Holy Bible teaches about Jesus. I allow the Divine Truth of Scripture to penetrate my mind and I trust that what God has revealed in scripture is true. And the fruit that this has happened in my life, is seen in my obedience.

Okay that is simple. But why is it my “chief *duty*” to “love” and “enjoy” God? How can a “duty” be a “joy” or a “love”? Isn't a “duty” an “obligation”? Isn't a “duty” a “requirement” and something that I *have* to do?

To love something or to enjoy something is to take delight in it. It is to relish in it, to value it and treasure it; and take pleasure in it. But

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<sup>1</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism

how can a *requirement* be something that I delight in? How can something I am forced to do and told to do ever be something I take pleasure in? And exactly what would that look like? And this is the essence of my Message today.

I am trying to say that dry, rote obedience is *not* what God has required from us. I am trying to say that checking off the list of all that we are supposed to do, in Jesus' Name and for His Glory, is *not* obeying God.

Because God didn't just say, "*Obey Me*". God didn't just say, "*Do what I told you because I am worthy of your obedience*". God said, "*Obey Me with Joy*". God said, "*Delight in Me*". God said, "*Let your obedience flow out from a mind that has grown in the knowledge of God, and let it flow out from a will that has been radically transformed by the Grace of God, so that you genuinely take pleasure in doing what I said*".

In fact, let me say that simply doing what God says out of a sense of duty or a sense of obligation or because it is a requirement, does not honor what Jesus did or Who He is at all. And if you become arrogant about your level of obedience, if you take pride in your service to God, if you begin to think that your obedience is solely the result of what you have done for yourself in growing in the knowledge of God because you have spent so much time in the Word, not only have you *not* honored Jesus Christ, but you have become nothing more than a Pharisee.

We must remember that Legalists ignore the Grace of God. Antinomians abuse God's Grace, but Legalists ignore Grace, and they replace God's amazing Grace with more human effort, more exercises in will-power, and more religious activities.

So, if your Sanctification involves *only* what you are "doing" for yourself to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, you are already woefully off base and your Salvation is in jeopardy. And I'm going to try to let you see what this looks like by using a very common example that I have been pondering now for quite some time.

So, let me begin by asking a very important question:

Is a husband required to kiss his wife at night?

And when I ask almost any husband that question, they almost invariably answer, "*Yes!*" Almost every husband I know says that there

are *many* ways to show love to their wife, like paying bills, and buying them something nice, or doing something special for them. But they usually go on to add that *part* of loving their wives is showing them affection. And part of showing affection is kissing them. So, yes, they are required to kiss their wives.

Now almost every Christian husband I know will add to that by saying, "*God has required me to love my wife. I am to love my wife like Christ loved the Church*". So, in their mind, *part* of a husband obeying Jesus is loving his wife. And kissing her is part of all the other things he does to show love to his wife.

But, when I ask wives, especially Christian wives, that same question, they say, "*Yes, but not like that.*" And what they mean by that is "*Yes*", they want and enjoy to be kissed at night. But, "*No*", they don't want to be kissed simply because God has *commanded* their husbands to love them. Wives want their husbands to love them *freely*, because they *enjoy* it, because they *delight* in them, and wives want their husbands to love them without *constraint*, without being *coerced* or feeling *obligated*.

So, every year on September 5<sup>th</sup>, I do something special for Rhonda to illustrate how much I value her and treasure her. And suppose that I go and buy her a beautiful bouquet of flowers. And I walk up to the door and I put the flowers behind my back and I knock on the door and wait. And Rhonda sees me standing at the door, and motions for me to come on in since the door is unlocked. But I stand there because I'm so excited and I want Rhonda to see what I'm doing.

So, finally, she comes and opens the door and I pull the flowers from behind my back and I present them to her. And she gets all embarrassed, and she says, "*Oh, Blair, why did you do this?*"

Now what would you think her response would be if I said, "*God has required me to love you, so here is my effort to be obedient.*"? She wouldn't like that at all, would she? But, why? Isn't that a true statement? Hasn't God *required* me to love her? Has He not told me that it is sin if I don't? So why wouldn't Rhonda like me to say that?

Because, simple "*duty*" doesn't honor my wife. Simply believing the Divine Truth of Scripture that *commands* me to love my wife doesn't bring honor to my wife. Operating out of obligation or coercion or responsibility because I fear retribution does not display the *worth* and

the *value* that I have placed on my wife. My wife is only honored if I *enjoy* her.

But, how would she respond if I say, "*Nothing makes me happier than to do this for you.*" Or, "*Nothing brings me more delight than to carry out this effort for you.*" She would be happy, right? But, why? Think what I just said:

*Nothing makes me happier than to do this for you*

Why does *me* receiving joy for my service to my wife please her? Because it proves that my service to my wife is the very *source* of my joy. It displays that my admiration for her and my value for her and my delight in her is what motivates my action. So, the thing that shows the great value that I place on my wife, and that displays the love I have for my wife, and that proves beyond any doubt that I treasure my wife, is that serving her is merely the outward response to delighting in her.

And what I'm trying to say is that God takes no glory in joyless obedience. God is not honored by obedience that is coerced or that is forced or that is carried out because of the fear of retribution. God is only honored when the gift of Grace has so transformed me, and is continually transforming me, to the degree that I don't merely obey, I obey because my obedience is the outflow of my delight in Him. Outward acts of obedience are nothing but demonstrations of the Reality that God has sovereignly and graciously worked inside of me, all by Himself, to radically transform me, so that I now joy in Jesus and serving Him is my pleasure.

We must be constantly reminded that you don't have to be saved to read the Bible. You don't have to be saved to pray. You don't have to be saved to struggle to obey the 10 Commandments. You don't have to be saved to want a better life and to want to go to Heaven. Lost people all through the centuries have done all these things and more.

But, while you don't have to be saved to outwardly obey what God said, you *do* have to be saved to love God. You *do* have to be saved to delight in Him and treasure Him and to enjoy Him. And that is why I told you that simple outward obedience to what God said isn't enough. Jesus said in **John 15:11**:

**These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.**

So, there is a "Joy", a "Delight", a "Love" that belongs to Jesus Christ. It is His. It does not normally or naturally dwell in human beings because of the Fall. And this Joy and Delight and Love treasures the Father and delights to do His Will. This Joy is the very *source* of Jesus' obedience to His Father. And His obedience was perfect. And Jesus says here that the reason He came to this earth and spoke these Words to us was so that:

**My joy may be in you**

... and when His Joy that He has in God the Father is in me, my own joy will be made full.

So, God continually and sovereignly and graciously working in me, as **Philippians 2:13** says, is the *ongoing* transformation whereby Jesus gives me the very *same* Joy that He has *with* the Father. Jesus gives to me the very *same* Delight that He has *in* the Father, and Jesus gives me the very *same* Love that He has *for* the Father.

And when Jesus gives me His Own Joy and Delight and Love, my own joy will be full. And the outflow of that is that I will "work out" my Salvation. So, the ongoing "Working" of God in me continues to radically change me to the degree that I genuinely take pleasure in living underneath the Law of God, that restricts my behavior, and that displays the value and the worth that I have placed on God Himself. And when I truly delight to carry out God's Will, that shows that the working of God in me is working, and Jesus has become my Treasure, and that I love the Creator more than I love that which He has created.

And the important thing to remember about this is, that I cannot *initiate* this kind of Love and Delight and Joy and this Affection for God. I have no power, no ability, whatsoever, to work up this kind of Delight and this Enjoyment of God. I can't rub the two sticks of my will-power and human effort to produce this love and enjoyment of God.

The Bible teaches that this love *for* God is a gracious gift from God. It is a marvelous gift of His Grace. And so, I am completely helpless to facilitate any real and lasting love and enjoyment and delight for God. All the knowledge in the world will not produce it.

These affections for God are a sovereign Work of God alone, and they are the part of my Sanctification that God has to do all by Himself. I have to simply beg God to give to me what I do not normally or naturally possess.

And so *part* of my progressive Sanctification, part of me working out my Salvation with fear and trembling, is that God mercifully and graciously distributes more and more of this love for Himself and this enjoyment of Himself to me, as I continue to labor to grow in the knowledge of God.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.