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The Believer’s Role in Sanctification

2: 12

The Believer’s role in sanctification DIG: What is an antimony? What mistake do some make when trying to reconcile every doctrine in a humanly rational way? How did the Messiah show His love for the Philippians? In light of working out your salvation, what part is up to you? What two aspects are you involved in?

REFLECT: Are you relying on the Ruach or relying on yourself lately? In what ways is Messiah your example for living in today’s world? What does it mean for you to work out your salvation in fear and trembling? What does this look like for you? What is the world’s philosophy of joy and the believers in Yeshua?

Sanctification is to be set apart; specifically, to the holy use and purposes of God.

As John MacArthur relates in his commentary on *Philippians*, from the earliest days of the Church, the relationship between the power of **God** and the responsibility of believers in living a godly life has been debated. Is the believer’s life simply a matter of passive trust or active obedience? Is it all **God’s** doing, all the believer’s doing, or a combination of both? This is not an unusual question when dealing with spiritual truth; in fact, the same question arises about salvation itself. Is it all **God’s** doing, or is there a requirement on our part in response to the command to believe the Gospel? Scripture makes it clear that it involves both **God’s** sovereignty and human response. **Paul** reminded the **Ephesians**, “**For it is by grace you have been saved through faith . . . and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not a result of works, so that no one can boast**” (Ephesians 2:8-9). In **John 6:44**, **Yeshua** declared: **No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; yet **Acts 16:31** commands: **Believe in the Lord Yeshua, and you will be saved**. Salvation is not by human works, yet it is always through personal faith. Other doctrines also involve seeming paradoxes. For example, **Yeshua Messiah** is both fully **God** and fully **man**, and while the Bible was written

by human authors, every word of it was inspired by **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**. **The Trinity** is made up of one **God** revealed in three distinct **Persons**. We were chosen **before the foundations of the earth** were set, yet we must make a decision for **Messiah** in order to be saved! **This is called an antimony, meaning two things that seem to contradict each other, but both are true.**

Believers who try to reconcile every doctrine in a humanly rational way are inevitably drawn to extremes. To achieve their goal of fully understanding without an antimony, they emphasize one truth or aspect of **God’s Word** at the expense of others, which to the finite mind, seem to contradict it. In regard to **sanctification**, the view that emphasizes **God’s** role while virtually eliminating the believer’s involvement is often referred to as quietism. And the view that emphasizes the opposite extreme is called pietism.

In **Philippians 2:12** and **13**, **Paul** presents the appropriate resolution between the believer’s part and **God’s** part in **sanctification**. Yet **he** makes no effort to rationally harmonize the two. **He** is content with the incomprehensibility and simply states both truths, saying, in effect, on the one hand, **sanctification** is of believers (**v. 12**) and on the other hand, it is of **God** (**v. 13**). The same dual emphasis is found throughout the B’rit Chadashah (**2 Peter 1:3-10; 1 Cor 15:10; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:28-29; and James 4:7**).

As **Paul** emphasizes in **verse 13** (**to see link click [Az](#) - God’s Role in Sanctification**), salvation is from **God**. But here in **verse 12** **he** focuses on the responsibility of believers to live lives that are consistent with the divine **gift** of salvation. Because **we live by the Spirit**, that is, we have the divine life of **Messiah** within us, we should **also walk by the Spirit** (**Galatians 5:25**).

Everything in life requires energy. It takes energy to walk and to work. It takes energy to obey and to worship **ADONAI**. The point of the present verse is that it takes spiritual energy to **be conformed to the image of Messiah** (**Romans 8:29-30**). To live a life that is holy, fruitful, and pleasing to our **Lord**. The main verb in this verse, *katergazomai* (**to work out**), specifically calls for the constant energy and effort necessary to finish a task. **Paul** suggests five truths that believers must understand to sustain such energy: **Their example, their being loved, their obedience, their responsibilities, and the consequences of sin.**

Understand your example (2:12a): The first element of believer’s working out their **sanctification** is understanding **Messiah’s** example. **Therefore** translates

the Greek participle *hoste*, which was used to draw a conclusion from a preceding statement. Here, it refers back to the example of **Yeshua Messiah**, whose perfect model of humility, submission, and **obedience** (see [Av](#) - **Obedient to Death**). In **His** incarnation, **Yeshua** did not cling to **His** equality with **God the Father**, but **emptied Himself** of **His** divine rights and prerogatives. Taking **the form** of a humble **bond-servant**, **He** was obedient to **His heavenly Father**, even to the point of dying on the Roman cross as a sacrifice for sin. It is also true that the self-emptying of the **Son of God** placed **Him** in the role of a **servant** to the will of **the Father** and the power of **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**. One of the greatest realities of the Incarnation was the fact that our **Lord** did what **He** did in **the Spirit’s power** (**Luke 4:1, 14, 18, and 5:17; Acts 10:38; cf. Matthew 12:18 and 28-32**). The essence of living a godly life is being **obedient** like **Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Yeshua did (First John 2:6)**.

Understand that you are loved (2:12b): **Paul’s** next words suggest a second element of us **working out** our **sanctification**, understanding that we are greatly **loved**. **My beloved** were unmistakably words of comfort and encouragement. **The apostle** knew that **the Philippians** would face many disappointments and failures as **they** sought to follow **the Lord’s** example in living for **Him**. **Paul’s love** for **them** reflected **Messiah’s love** for **His Church** (cf. **1:8**). **The apostle** was well aware of **their** weaknesses and shortcomings. **He** understood the dangers **they** faced from worldly false teachers, including both Jewish legalists and Gentile slanderers. All of **them** were **enemies of the Messiah, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things (3:18-19)**. **He** knew of the conflict between **Euodia** and **Syntyche**, sisters in **Messiah** whom **he** had admonished **to live in harmony in the Lord (4:2)**. It is likely that many believers in the church were inclined to be proud, hence the urgent call to follow **Messiah’s** example of humility (see [Au](#) - **To Model the Messiah**). Just as **the Lord** did with **him** and does with all of **His** children, **Paul** made allowance for **their** failures. **They** did not serve a hard, merciless deity, as did **their** pagan neighbors. **They** served a merciful, forgiving, gracious **Lord** who was always willing to restore **them** to fellowship.

Understand obedience (2:12c): **Just as you have always obeyed**. Another aspect of believers’ working out their **sanctification** is understanding the need for **obedience**. **Paul** encouraged **the Philippians** to continue in faithful submission to **God’s** will. Believers obviously must hear **God’s Word** if they are to be **obedient**

to **it**. So this is an appeal for believers to continue to study and obey Scripture (**Matthew 28:19-20**).

Lydia obeyed **the Word** that **she** heard **Paul** preach. **She** was already a worshiper of **ADONAI**, and as she **was listening . . . the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken of by Paul (Acts 16:14)**. So too did **the Philippian jailer**, who may have been among those to whom **the apostle** was now writing. After **Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house, he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household (Acts 16:32-33)**. In much the same way, **the Jews in Berea received the word with great eagerness** because **they** were **examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11)**. **Obedience** is essential to **sanctification** which cannot take place without it.

Understand personal responsibilities and resources (2:12d): Not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence. The fourth aspect of believers’ working out their **sanctification** is understanding their personal responsibilities and resources. Because believers are sinful, they can sometimes be inclined to be self-justifying, blaming circumstances or other people for their problems and failures. Therefore, **Paul** commends **the Philippians** for **their** faithful pattern of obedience to **Messiah** while **they** were in his **presence**. But **he** goes on to say that **they** were just as obligated to obey during **his absence**.

In essence, **the apostle** repeats a caution **he** made earlier: **Conduct yourself worthy of the Good News of the Messiah, so that whether I come and see you or I hear about you from a distance, you are standing firm, united in one spirit, fighting with one mind and striving together for the faith of the Good News (1:27)**. His point is that there is never a time when a true believer is not responsible to **obey the Lord**. Believers must never be *primarily* dependent on their pastor, teacher, fellow believer, or anyone else for their spiritual strength and growth. Their supreme resource is **the Lord Yeshua Messiah** and **His Word**, and **the Ruach** to interpret it. Gratefully, we are never without **Messiah’s** example and never without **the Spirit’s** power.



Understand the consequences of sin (2:12e): The fifth motive for believers’ **working out** their **sanctification** is understanding the consequences of sin. **Continue to work out** (Greek: *katergazomai*) **your salvation with fear and trembling**. Although **ADONAI** is loving, merciful, and forgiving, **He** nevertheless holds us accountable for disobedience. Like **John**, **Paul** understood well that **if we say that we are without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:8-9)**. Knowing that we serve a holy and just **God**, the faithful believer will always live with **fear and trembling**. An important truth in the TaNaKh is that **the fear of ADONAI is the beginning of wisdom** (see **Proverbs Ai - The Fear of ADONAI is the Beginning of Wisdom**). This is not a **fear** of being doomed to eternal torment, not a hopeless dread of judgment that leads to despair. It is rather a reverential **fear**, a holy concern to give **YHVH** the honor **He** deserves and avoid the discipline of **His** displeasure. Such **fear** protects us against temptation and sin, and gives motivation for **obedience**, righteous living.

To have such godly **fear and trembling** involves more than merely acknowledging our sinfulness and spiritual weakness. It is the sincere, reverential fear that springs from deep adoration and **love**. It acknowledges that every sin is an offense against 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 willingly accept **the Lord’s** discipline know that **God disciplines His children** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz - God Disciplines His Children**). This **fear and trembling** will cause believers to pray earnestly for **ADONAI’s** help in avoiding sin, as **Yeshua** taught them: **Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matthew 6:13)**. This prayer again reflects the spiritual tension that exists

between believers’ duty and **God’s** power.

To work out (Greek: *katergazomai*) is the idea of *keep on working out to completion, to ultimate fulfillment*. The command for us is to make a continuing, sustained effort **to work out** to the ultimate completion of our **salvation**, which has been graciously granted to us by **ADONAI** through our faith in **Yeshua Messiah**. This principle of **working out our salvation in fear and trembling** has **two aspects**.

The first pertains to **personal conduct, to faithful, obedient daily living (Second Corinthians 7:1; Colossians 3:2-3; Romans 6:19; Ephesians 4:1; First Corinthians 9:24-27)**. If living a godly lifestyle were merely a matter of passive yielding and surrender, of “letting go and letting God,” then such cautions not only would be unnecessary, but arrogant. But those injunctions, and countless others like them throughout **God’s Word**, presuppose our personal responsibility for **obedience**. We must choose to live righteously, **working out** our **salvation** in the choices we make daily; while at the same time, realizing that all the power for that obedience comes from **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**.

The second aspect of **working out our salvation in fear and trembling** is **perseverance**, being faithfully obedient to the end of our lives. **Sanctification** has three dimensions: past, present, and future. The past dimension is that of justification at the moment of salvation. The present dimension is **sanctification**, or spiritual growth in holiness. And the future dimension is our glorification, when salvation is completed and we receive our glorified bodies (see [Ax - Sanctification](#) for more details). Perseverance in the faith is the duty of every believer, and yet not the power of our security. It is, however, the unmistakable and inevitable evidence of divine power operating within us (**Colossians 1:29**). We persevere because **ADONAI’s** power keeps our salvation secure (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer](#)). So the call for us to **work out [our] salvation in fear and trembling** is found all through the B’rit Chadashah. That is only fitting and proper, since it is a call for the necessary commitment on our part that is a prerequisite for the joys, blessings, and usefulness of our **sanctification**.⁸⁹

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Your** gift of sanctification thru which **You** mold me into the image of **Messiah**. **The Master** says it well when **he** explains that a relationship with **God** is more than mere knowing about **His** love. **Messiah** says our responsibility for salvation and for **sanctification** is listening and learning*



from **Him** and living a life **yoked** to **God (Mt 11:28-29)**. **Sanctification** is ultimately **His** work. **May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through (1 Thess 5:23a)**. How wonderful that by **Your** abiding **Presence, You** are always there to help to guide me in my **sanctification**. In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen