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God's Role in Sanctification

2: 13

God's role in sanctification DIG: Who sanctifies us? How are we sanctified? Why are we sanctified? What is the result of our sanctification? In light of working out your salvation, what part is up to God? How does ADONAI use holy discontent and holy aspiration to motivate us to do the work of sanctification?

REFLECT: How are you doing by balancing your role in sanctification and God's role? Do you sometimes try to take the steering wheel of your life and put God in the back seat? Or do you sometimes think that God will do all the heavy lifting and you don't have to do anything? How can either one be really bad for you?

Even though sanctification takes a great effort on our part, it is totally dependent on God's power.

As John MacArthur has stated in his commentary on *Philippians*, there are two equal and opposite errors into which believers may fall concerning the doctrine of **sanctification (to see link click [Ay](#) - The Believers Role in Sanctification: two aspects)**. On the one hand, quietists stress **God's** role in **sanctification**, to the virtual exclusion of any human effort. Pietists, in contrast, emphasize self-effort at the expense of reliance on **God's** power. In **Philippians 2:12-13, the apostle Paul** avoids both of those unbiblical extremes, and presents the true balanced view of **sanctification**. Having presented the believer's responsibility in **sanctification** in **2:12, Paul**, in **verse 13** focuses on **God's** role in the believer's **sanctification**. While believers are **working "out" their sanctification, God is working "in" you**. In fact, apart from the reality of **verse 13**, the fulfillment of **verse 12** would be impossible.

Yeshua stressed that truth in the Upper Room Discourse, given to **His apostles** on the night before **His** death: **Remain in Me, as I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot**

be fruitful unless you remain in me. I am the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing (John 15:4-5). In this verse, **Paul** indicates the divine work of **sanctification** by emphasizing **five key features** about **ADONAI**: **His Person, His power, His Presence, His purpose, and His pleasure.**

His Person: For it is God (2:13a NASB 1995). The first truth about **God’s** part in believer’s **sanctification** is **His Personhood**, which is made clear by the personal pronouns **who** and **His** and by the verbs **to will** and **to work**. Most pagan deities are described as impersonal, remote, and indifferent. But the true and living **God** of Scripture is real and personal. The Bible doesn’t try to prove that **God** is a **Person** because it assumes that **He** is. In both the TaNaKh and the B’rit Chadashah **He** is spoken of in anthropomorphic (human like) terms, such as having eyes and seeing, of having ears and hearing, of having feet and walking, of **love** and hating, weeping and laughing, condemning and forgiving. **He** thinks, feels, acts, and speaks – all elements of being a real living **Person**. **He** has a personal concern for mankind, and especially for **His** children. That personal concern is also seen in **His** work in believers.

The **God** of the Bible has unimaginable **love** for fallen, sinful mankind, which has rebelled against **Him**, blasphemed **Him**, and vilified **Him**. **He** has such great **love** for them **that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:16-17).** It is not **the Lord’s will for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9).**

For those who belong to **Him**, **ADONAI** has even greater **love** and the closest personal relationship. In the TaNaKh (**Isaiah 63:16** and **64:8**), and especially in the B’rit Chadashah (**Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 9, and 23:9**), **He** is referred to as **His** children’s **Father**. **Adam and Eve, Moses, Job, Malachi** and many other kedoshim spoke to **Ha’Shem** directly. The omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent **Creator** and **Sustainer** of the universe **loves His** children with an everlasting **love** and **chesed** (see the commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**). **ADONAI** protects them according to **His** everlasting covenant and promises.⁹⁰ No more so than **Isra’el**, who is **the very pupil of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8; Proverbs 7:2; Zechariah 2:8)** and **His chosen people**, (see **Romans Cw - The Future Paradox of Isra’el**), **chosen** out of all the peoples on earth to be **His treasured possession** (see the commentary

on **Deuteronomy Cb - God has Chosen Isra'el**). Yet, **He** has compassion on the Goyim and will graft those who **love the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** into **the Olive Tree** (see the commentary on **Dani'el Dx - The Mystery of the Olive Tree**).



His power: who is at work (2:13b NASB 1995). The second essential truth emphasized here about **God's** part in the believer's **sanctification** is **His** divine power. Above all else, it is **ADONAI who is at work** in the lives of **His** children. **He** calls us to obey, and then through **His** sovereign power, enables our obedience. **He** calls us to **His** service, and then empowers our service. **He** calls us to holiness, and then empowers us to pursue holiness. **Work** is from the Greek verb *energeo* the source of the English word *energy*. **Ruach Ha'Kodesh** energizes **His** children to obey and serve **Him**; **His** power enables our **sanctification**. As noted in the previous file (see **Ay - The Believer's Role in Sanctification**), believers can do nothing **holy** or righteous in their own power or resources. Just as **no one can be justified by the work of the flesh (Rom 3:20)**, so **no one can be [sanctified] by the flesh (Gal 3:3)**.

It is important that believers minister to each other, because that is **God's** will (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Ch - Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts**). It is also **God's** will that teachers and preachers minister to the Church (**Ephesians 4:11-13**). It is important that **the holy angels minister** to believers, because **ADONAI sends out those spirits who serve** (ministering **servants**) **to help those who will inherit eternal life (1:14)**. But above all else, God Himself is our supreme and indispensable resource and power. The most amazing thing is that **it**

is God who is at work in us. Paul summed it up in **Colossians 1:29** when he said: **I labor, striving according to His power, which works mightily within me.**

His Presence: in you (2:13c NASB 1995). The third essential truth about God’s part in our **sanctification** is His divine **Presence**. The preposition in is often featured in Paul’s writings as he records the truth that **Yeshua Messiah** dwells in believers (**Romans 8:9-10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:1 to 2:12; Colossians 1:27**). The Lord Himself spoke of His indwelling **Presence: The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know the You sent Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me (John 17:22-23)**. David understood and gloried in the reality of **ADONAI’s** continual **Presence** within him: **You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways (Psalm 139:3)**.

God works unceasingly for the welfare of His people (**Romans 8:28**). His holiness, wisdom, power, love, **Presence**, and mercy are infinite. Having begun our new life in **Messiah** through the power of the **Ruach Ha’Kodesh**, we are **perfected [sanctified]** by that same divine power. Because some believers in the **Galatian** churches were seeking to live by their own foolish “wisdom” and resources, Paul asked in dismay, **“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected [sanctified] by the flesh (Galatians 3:3)**.

His purpose: both to will and to work (2:13d NASB 1995). The fourth essential truth emphasized here, which is the heart of God’s work in believers’ **sanctification**, is His divine purpose. That purpose is revealed by what He energizes believers to do . . . **both to will and to work**. This phrase is best interpreted as not to **God’s will and work** but to that of believers. **The will** to do what is right before **God** must precede any effective **work** that is done toward that end. A genuine desire to do **God’s will**, as well as the power to obey it, originates with **Him**. **ADONAI** uses two means to motivate our wills.

First, is what might be called **holy discontent**, the humble recognition that one’s life always falls short of **God’s** standard of holiness. When **Isaiah** saw **ADONAI** **sitting on a high, lofty throne! The hem of his robe filled the Temple. He** could only exclaim in reverential fear: **Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips (Is 6:1**

and **5**). Like all righteous people, **he** was dissatisfied with **his** spiritual state – a dissatisfaction immeasurably intensified by that awesome experience. Although **Paul** could say: **I am conscious of nothing against myself**, but **he** was quick to add: **but this does not make me innocent (1 Cor 4:4)**. As **he** carefully and honestly examined **his** life, **he** knew that **his** finite perception could not detect every sin or spiritual shortcoming. **His holy** discontent led **him** to lament in **his** letter to the church at Rome: **Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death (Rom 7:24)**.

Second, the means **God** uses to move our will is **holy aspiration**, the positive side of **holy** discontent. After **Ha’Shem** instills a genuine hatred of sin, **He** cultivates a genuine desire for righteousness. After **He** makes believers discontent with what we are, **He** gives us the aspiration to greater holiness. Above all, it is the desire to be like **Messiah, to become conformed to the image of [God’s] Son (Romans 8:29)**. **Paul** brings together **his** own **holy discontent** and **holy aspiration** when **he** confesses: **Not that I have already obtained all this, or have been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Messiah Yeshua took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do know: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 3:12-14)**.

Holy resolve leads to **holy** living. A godly **will** produces godly **work**. It cannot be overemphasized that only **ADONAI** can produce in believers the **will** or the **work** that **He** commands of us. **James** noted that **every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights (James 1:17)**. Understanding that truth, the writer to the **Hebrews** wrote: **Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Yeshua our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Yeshua Messiah (Hebrews 13:20-21)**.

Just as believers are not saved by **good works** but wholly by **God’s grace working through their faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)**, so we are **sanctified** by **His grace** working through our obedience. We are **God’s workmanship, created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that [we] would walk in them (Ephesians 2:10)**. Just as believers are sovereignly **predestined** to salvation, so also are we **predestined** to **sanctification**. Again, **Romans 8** is helpful: **For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to**

be conformed [sanctified] to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers; and these whom He predestined, He also called, and these whom He called, He also justified, and these whom He justified, He also glorified (Romans 8:29-30).

His pleasure: for His good pleasure (2:13e NASB 1995). The fifth and final essential reality about **God’s** part in our **sanctification** is the overwhelming truth that **He** works in our **sanctification for His** own **good pleasure**. **His** will for us is that we think and do what pleases **Him**. Although that is accomplished primarily by **His** own power, when **His** children seek **His** will and do **His** work, it brings **Him** great **pleasure**. Because **ADONAI** is infinitely self-sufficient, one cannot wonder how anything or anyone, especially a sinful human being, could add to **His** satisfaction. Yet, that is what **Paul** is saying. Even when they were weak, hesitant, and fearful, **Yeshua** assured **His** disciples: **Don’t be afraid little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the Kingdom (Luke 12:32)**. Giving a place in **His** Kingdom to **His** children brings **God** great **pleasure**.

Because our **sanctification** brings **Him** great pleasure, **God** grants us the resources to pursue it. **Paul** wrote to **the Ephesians** that **the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah . . . has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah . . . [and has] made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him (Ephesians 1:3 and 9)**. To **the Thessalonians** he added that **ADONAI** will fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Even when we rebel against **Him**, **God** still desires to bless **His** people if we will repent and obey (**First John 1:9**). **Isaiah** addressed these encouraging words to a rebellious **Isra’el**. **Seek ADONAI while He is available, call on Him while He is still nearby. Let the wicked person abandon his way and the evil person his thoughts; let him return to ADONAI, and he will have mercy on him; let him return to our God, for He will freely forgive (Isaiah 55:6-7)**. Through **Hosea**, **God** said to **His** people: **How can I give up on you, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Isra’el? . . . My heart is changed within Me; all My compassion is aroused. I will not carry out My fierce anger, nor devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not man - the Holy One among you. I will not come with wrath (Hosea 11:8-9)**.

We need to understand that even though **sanctification** takes a great effort, it is

nonetheless totally dependent on **God’s** power. Like many other truths in the Bible, those seemingly irreconcilable realities are hard to understand. Having done all we can, believers are to give **ADOANI** all the credit. Just as our **Lord** instructed, after we have done **all the things which are commanded**, we are to confess: **We are unworthy servants; we have done only that which we ought to have done**, not deserving of thanks or reward.⁹¹ It is not that **God** wants the groveling common to **servants**, but the absence of pride expected of those who know that obeying **Him** is a matter of **duty**, saying: **We have only done our duty (Luke 17:10)**. The Pharisees served **God** for reward; **but Yeshua** cautioned **His apostles** were to avoid the leaven of pride. There was no room for boasting and **they** needed to remember who was to serve whom. This is a valuable lesson for us as well.

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for caring so much for me. You have promised to walk with me so that **You** are right there to help me to grow and to mature through trials and temptations. Yet I have the responsibility of listening and following **Your Word**, so that I can mature in the faith and be **sanctified**. Meditating on **Your Word** is food to the soul, nourishing and strengthening it. **Blessed are those whose delight is in ADONAI’s Torah, on His Torah they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, they bear fruit in season, their leaves never wither, everything they do succeeds (Psalm 1:1a,2-3)**. My role is to **abide in You. Abide in Me, and I will abide in you. The branch cannot itself produce fruit, unless it abides on the vine. Likewise, you cannot produce fruit unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me, you can do nothing (John 15:4-5)**. In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*