

# Change is Possible

Pastor Chris Baker // 06.17.18 // Centralia FBC

## Philippians 2:12-13

### SBC Update

This week my family and I had the privilege of attending the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Dallas, TX. This was the first time as a pastor I've attended the SBC's annual meeting which, at its core, is a 2-day business meeting. Which may not sound like a lot of fun to you and there were certainly some aspects of our time together that were not encouraging. But overall, we are very hopeful and excited for what God is doing in the SBC as a whole.

If you're new to the church or new to Southern Baptist churches overall you might not be familiar with how our convention works so I wanted to give you a little bit of background on what it means for our church to cooperate with the SBC. Cooperate really is the right word because we do not belong to any sort of hierarchical structure. Every Southern Baptist Church is fully autonomous. There is no Baptist pope. We voluntarily associate ourselves with the SBC on a national and international level, the Missouri Baptist Convention on a state level, and the Crossroads Baptist Association locally. We cooperate with all three of those organizations for the purpose of advancing the gospel in Mid-Missouri, the greater state of Missouri, and nationally/internationally.

There are over 47,000 churches that cooperate with the SBC with over 5 million people on average attending SBC churches this morning.

All 47,000 of those churches send financial support to the SBC for the purpose of advancing the gospel on a number of fronts. Collectively, those churches sent \$192 million to the SBC last year through what is known as the Cooperative Program. Most churches send this money through their state conventions and a percentage of it remains local while the rest is forwarded on to the SBC.

First Baptist Church contributed \$35,000 to the Cooperative Program last calendar year. \$18,550 of that money stayed here in Missouri to support the work of the Missouri Baptist Convention. The MBC is active on a number of fronts. You can see here that over \$13,000 of the money we sent the MBC was used for 'missions and ministries' which involve church planting, outreach, and programs like the one that pays to provide college students as summer interns to local churches. We are benefitting from the services of 5 of these interns here at First Baptist this summer.

\$3,500 went to support the work of two colleges that are funded partially by the MBC. A little over \$1,000 of what we sent to the MBC supports their operating expenses and went to fund the Missouri Baptist Foundation, which is an organization that provides a number of financial helps to MBC churches and members. Finally, 2% of the MBC's operating budget funds the MBC children's home.

Over \$14,000 was sent from the MBC to the Southern Baptist Convention on our behalf—with about \$1,700 being applied to costs that those two organizations share.

The money we sent to the SBC was used to support the International Mission Board, which sends missionaries literally all over the world to further the gospel, the North American Mission Board, which sends missionaries to college campuses and areas in need here in the US, Canada, and Mexico. Nine percent of SBC funds are used to support the six Southern Baptist seminaries located in Kentucky, North Carolina, Texas, Louisiana, California, and right here in Missouri. Christian education has long been a hallmark of the baptist faith and our seminaries are world-renowned as centers for theological education. The remainder of the SBC budget is used to fund the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission which engages public entities in debate and on policy issues from a Christian world view on topics such as racial relations, abortion, and gender, and for the operating expenses of the convention as a whole.

This year, 9,600 messengers from the 47,000 churches showed up in Dallas to set the agenda for the SBC for the coming year. That might not sound like a whole lot of messengers considering there are 47,000 churches but on the positive side that was almost twice the number of messengers who showed up for the previous year's convention and the most since 2010.

Those messengers elected J.D. Greear, pastor of Summit Church in Raleigh, NC to serve as president. He's the second youngest president in the history of the SBC and someone I'm extremely excited to support as his writing ministry and preaching have impacted me in a number of ways over the years.

The most exciting part of the two-day business meeting for me, though, was the commissioning of 79 missionaries from the IMB to advance the gospel in some of the most-needed areas of the world.

Finally, SBC churches saw an overall attendance increase of 2% this year, which translates to over 120,000 new folks attending SBC churches.

There's a lot to be excited about both nationally and here locally. God is at work in our congregation and in our convention. Let's pray and ask God to continue to work and to bless our time together as we jump into the text this morning.

### **Catching Up**

We have been studying the book of Philippians together since April. We took last week off from this study as brother Bill Davis brought us a great word from John 3. I've heard great feedback and we're thankful that God has blessed our congregation with a man as gifted as Bill to bring the Word.

We're jumping right back into Philippians today as we come to 2:12-13. The overarching idea of this passage began all the way back in 1:27 where Paul charged the Philippians and us to live as worthy citizens of God's kingdom. From 1:27 all the way up to the verses we're studying today, Paul has been adding substance to what it means to live as worthy citizens. In verses 6-11 he held up Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of Kingdom citizenship through His humiliation even unto death on the cross and through His exaltation to the right hand of the Father.

It's in light of those verses that Paul goes on to speak a very important truth to the Philippians in our text.

That's the reason for the therefore in the beginning of verse 12. Remember, a good rule of thumb for studying Scripture is that when you encounter a therefore, you need to go back

and see what's it's there for. The therefore in verse 12 is referencing the lofty picture of Christ that Paul has painted in verses 6-11 and verse 5's appeal to emulate that attitude.

Let's read God's Word together:

***12 Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.***

## **Commendation and Command**

We have in these two verses a commendation and a command that we will talk about shortly but I want to lay before you in the beginning the main point to the sermon that I want you to take with you today and it is this: ***Because you belong to God, a changed life is possible.***

When you boil down these two verses that is what you are left with. And that is the main point of the sermon today, but it brings with it a number of implications. I believe the main idea that Paul wants the Philippians to grasp is that because of what Jesus Christ accomplished in being humiliated unto death and exalted unto glory to earn for you a place as citizens of God's Kingdom you now, through that citizenship, belong to God and He is at work both in you and through you and because of that—growth as a Christian is possible. Without that, if God was not at work in you, then growth would never be possible.

The idea that we need to grow as disciples was not new to the Philippians and I don't think it's new for you either, but understanding both the why and the how of it are important. We know the Philippians at least had some understanding of this because verse 12 starts off with a commendation. Paul commends the church for their obedience.

## **A Commendation**

Paul isn't heavy handedly telling the Philippians that they stink at this whole following Christ thing and that they need to get down to the altar and get down on their knees and repent. Instead, he gives the whole church a communal commendation that they've been obedient and that they have been working out their salvation. This speaks very highly of the Philippian church as a whole.

But we need to recognize that even though the Philippian church was healthy, they were growing, and they were obedient—they still desperately needed to press on in their work of sanctification.

Sanctification is word you might not hear outside these walls, but it is one you need to know and understand. It's what these two verses we are studying today are all about and they're two of the most important verses concerning sanctification in all of Scripture. Sanctification is the process by which a disciple (which is what you are if you belong to Christ) becomes more and more free of sin and more and more like Christ in their lives. It begins when you are saved, or justified in the sight of God in that moment when you move from condemned to redeemed, and it continues all the way up until you meet God in eternity. As a disciple you will—or should—be gradually and constantly leading a life that reflects Christ more perfectly and reflects the attitudes and habits of your fallen, pre-Christ life less and less the longer you live.

I want us to see two things about this commendation before we move on: ***Paul is commending the Philippians to a work that is communal and continual.***

It's communal in that he's speaking to the entire Philippian church. Sanctification is the work of every disciple and it is something that we are to work at together. We are a reflection of the body of Christ here in Centralia and the way that each of the parts of the body work together matters. Your sanctification matters to the person sitting next to you. You want your Sunday School teacher or small group leader to be growing in sanctification. You want your kids' teachers to grow. As a Christian, you don't exist on an island and the Christian walk is not a solo journey. We are in this together and the way that we grow as individuals matters for the church as a whole. That's why we should pray for and encourage one another in our spiritual growth. It matters for our worship, it matters for our unity, and it matters for our mission in this community.

Paul's commendation to the Philippians is communal and it's also continual. Sanctification is like the internet, you can spend your whole life on it and never be finished. The Philippians were good, but they were not complete.

Paul is writing this whole section from the heart of a pastor. He said back in 1:27 that whether or not he could visit Philippi, he wanted to hear they were standing firm. Here he says even more in my absence you should be working in these things. Paul knew he

wouldn't always be around and they could not tie their faith to him or to any individual other than Jesus Christ. Paul's time was short but the Philippians' sanctification had to continue on. Some of you have been on this journey of faith for a long time and God has accomplished great work both in you and through you. . . but as long as you are on this side of eternity God is going to continually be at work in you to shape you into the image of His Son. No matter where you are at in your walk with the Lord today sitting in this room, God wants to grow you in your sanctification. Which brings us to the deep question that today's text provides us an answer to and that is how? How does sanctification work? Is it something that I do or something that God does?

We've seen the commendation Paul gives to the Philippians. Let's turn now to the command. There's only one imperative, one action statement, in this text and it's found at the end of verse 12. Paul writes: work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Verse 13 adds some depth and helps us build a fuller understanding of what happens in sanctification: For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.

There's some tension in these two verses. You could look at "work out your salvation" and get a little antsy, maybe a little uncomfortable. You could say, "If I'm the one doing the work, what's God's role?" God saves us, we know that. . .but are we on our own for sanctification? Is that what Paul means? I don't think so. Then does God do the work? Verse 13 tells us that it is God doing the work. So do we get to sit back and just let God do His work without any effort on our part? Do we say, "Here I am, Lord, sanctify me! I hope it doesn't hurt." That's not how it works either. Paul actually says here that both things are true.

Is your sanctification your responsibility? Paul's answer is yes. . . Is your sanctification the work of God? Paul's answer is yes. Is that hard to reconcile? Also yes, at least to some degree. But just because we don't fully understand it doesn't make it untrue. I don't understand how combines work . . . but in a few months they'll be all over the place stirring up dust and somehow magically picking the individual kernels from the corn while spewing all the other junk out the back. I don't know how, but I see evidence that it's true.

God is 100% sovereign over your sanctification—meaning that there is no growth where God does not, through His Holy Spirit, give you guidance. And you are 100% responsible for your own 'working out' of your salvation—as Paul puts it in the text. Notice it's working out salvation and not earning salvation. You don't earn your own salvation. You're saved by

grace alone on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ alone through faith alone for the glory of God alone. We bring nothing to the table in our justification—our ‘getting saved’ but Paul and the rest of Scripture testify that the responsibility for our growth as believers has been laid at our feet. The Holy Spirit leads us in obedience and without working in of God—that we see in verse 13—there can be no working out of our own salvation, but the working out is a mantle that Paul clearly commands the Philippians and us to take up in our own life. But that taking up is only possible because God is at work in us.

God has given us evidence all throughout Scripture that the work of sanctification in my life and your life is a beautiful process by which God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility work together for our growth, our goodness, and God’s glory.

I want us to look briefly at just a couple of spots in Scripture that illustrate how this is true. God illustrated it beautifully through Solomon in **1 Kings 8**.

***As Solomon is praying to dedicate the temple he says: 57 May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our ancestors. May he not abandon us or leave us 58 so that he causes us to be devoted to him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commands, statutes, and ordinances. . .***

Who causes devotion? God. Who causes us to walk in his ways, keep his commands, statutes and ordinances? God.

But then look on down in verse 61:

***61 Be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord our God to walk in his statutes and to keep his commands . . .***

God causes devotion. But then Solomon commands wholehearted devotion. God causes it, but we are responsible to carry it out.

We see this truth in the Old Testament. We also see it in the New Testament outside of the writings of Paul. ***2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.***

God has given us everything required for life and godliness. . . then in verse 5 ***For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge,6 knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, 7 godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.***

Because God has granted us everything required for life and godliness, Peter urges us to make every effort to take advantage of those gifts by striving for godly lives.

Scripture is clear that your spiritual growth is not something that you can accomplish apart from God, that you must be fully reliant on the Holy Spirit for guidance in your growth, but at the same time you are responsible for—in Paul’s words—working out your own salvation.

This idea of working out our salvation is interesting to me. Roman historian Strabo, who lived in the first century before Christ and wrote in Greek, gave an account of the once famous silver mines of Spain. He referred to the "working out of the mines" and used the exact word that Paul used in our text. He meant that they were to operate the mines in such a way that they could get the utmost value out of them. They already had the mines in their possession. Now they were to derive the full benefit from them. Pastor and author Brian Harbour commented ***“When we become Christians, God plants tremendous potential in our lives, like a mine, and He wants us to realize that potential to its fullest. Working out the full benefit of our salvation is a task to which we must be committed all our lives.”***<sup>1</sup>

God has planted tremendous potential for spiritual maturity in your life. I mentioned earlier that the IMB commissioned 79 missionaries to be sent out for full time service in the field this week. God planted tremendous potential for spiritual growth in those missionaries upon the moment of their salvation. He has implanted that very same potential in you. That doesn’t mean that your particular function in the Kingdom will be to serve in North Africa, or Eastern Europe, or Central Asia. It might be. One of my prayers for our church since before I even moved here is that God would raise up families from here to serve somewhere where the gospel of Jesus has never before been spoken.

That won’t be most of us. But we all have the potential for the same growth. It will manifest itself in different ways for each of us, but God has promised that it will happen if you only commit yourself to working it out.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians\\_212-18](http://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians_212-18)

Remember, the main point of our sermon and of this text is that ***because you belong to God, a changed life is possible.***

I want to use the remainder of our time to look quickly at three motivations from this text that should motivate us to lead changed lives and then at some practical ways we can take the next step.

The three motivations are directly from the text:

***1. Be motivated because God is holy***

A. We are to go about the working out of our salvation with fear and trembling. Paul doesn't mean boogeyman fear. He's talking about a reverential awe. I'm afraid of snakes. They're gross, creepy, they bite, and they're the animal Satan chose in the garden. I'm afraid of them and if you like them then you need counseling or something. That's not the kind of fear Paul means. We were created in the image of a Holy God, we were saved for the glory of a Holy God, and we are to live out the mission of a Holy God. The stakes are high and we should conduct ourselves accordingly. We should be awed by God and His goodness and it should motivate us to lead changed lives.

***II. Be motivated because God works in your heart and in your actions***

A. Paul writes in verse 13 that God is working both to will and work. Another way to say that is that God's work in your life happens in both your heart and in your hands. This is practically how God's sovereignty over and our responsibility for our growth interact. Augustine explained it well: ***"Our deeds are our own, because of the free will producing them, and they are also God's, because of his grace causing our free will to produce them. . . God makes us do what he pleases by making us desire what we might not desire."***<sup>2</sup> God works at the level of your will. He molds the inclinations of your heart over time to better reflect His nature in you. And he also works at the level of your actions to make your outward actions—the very way that you live your life—stand in more perfect harmony with who you are as a new creation in Christ.

***III. Be motivated because a changed life is God's purpose for you***

A. Your sanctification is God's purpose for your life. You were created for God's glory and when your life is in step with His purpose for you—when you're submitted to His

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<sup>2</sup> Marvin R. O'Connell, Blaise Pascal: Reasons of the Heart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1997), p. 154.

Will for your life—your life brings Him the most glory and so He is going to empower you to grow. This truth is reflected in Ephesians 2:8-10. “For by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Paul couldn't have been more clear that your works do not contribute to your acceptance with God. They do not contribute one at all to you being forgiven and pardoned. But then listen to v.10:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works....”

Does that sound off compared to vv. 8-9? Ligon Duncan explained it well:

***He started out by saying your works contribute absolutely nothing to your acceptance by God, and then he turns around and says God created you — He renewed you in Christ, He regenerated you, He converted you, He saved you — for good works. Now did Paul forget what he had just said? No. He's not contradicting himself. Notice where the works are. On which side of our acceptance are they? They are not on the side prior to our acceptance. They're afterwards. God didn't save us by our works, He saved us to our works; He didn't save us through our works, He saved us for our works. In other words, God didn't change us because our lives changed; our lives changed because God changed us.***<sup>3</sup>

***Because you belong to God, a changed life is possible.*** Some of you just need to believe that truth this morning. You've been around church a lot, you've heard things like this taught but you never really believed that you could do it. Maybe you've tried and it was hard so you don't feel like you can do it again. Whatever the case may be, you need to believe this is true because it's really the only way that any type of positive change in your spiritual life is possible. Because you belong to God He has empowered you to be able to change spiritually and to grow in His grace.

How do we do it?

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/fighting-for-joy-growing-in-humility-knowing-christ-and-the-peace-that-passes-understanding-a-study-of-philippians-29-sanctification-101-and-missions>

I'm going to close with three quick steps each of us need to take to grow as disciples. We've seen in the text that you're empowered to grow. Now, what does it look like?

***First, be in the Word.*** Everything you need to be saved and to grow to maturity as a Christian is contained in this book. Read it. Studying the Bible is a learned skill. So don't expect it to immediately be easy to you. If you have no idea where to start, I want to help you. See me or see Scott or another leader within the church, but we need desperately to be a church engaged with the Bible on a deeper level. First, be in the Word—every day.

***Second, be in the lives of other believers.*** Connect to other Christians and not just for the purpose of recreation, but specifically to help one another grow as disciples. We have Sunday School classes and Bible studies going on through our church body at various times throughout the week. Engage with other believers. Paul wrote the words we studied today to the entire church, not just to one or two believers.

***Third, take the next step in your faith.*** The first two look the same for everyone. This one is different for us all. Some of you need to be baptized, some of you need to join this fellowship, some of you need to make other commitments. But we all have a next step we need to take in our discipleship and if you don't know what yours is, pray. And pray hard that God would reveal to you what your next step in growth is. Remember, you're never finished.