

The topic in your summer lecture series is the battle within, killing sin before it kills you. And of course that comes from the famous saying of John Owen, be killing sin before it kills you. And so our topic then is sanctification and that internal battle with sin. I want to invite you to turn with me to Philippians chapter two. I think this is one of the most important passages on the topic of sanctification in the New Testament. There are a number of key passages, of course, that come to mind when you think about the doctrine of sanctification. One is Romans 6, but this passage, I think, says a lot of things that are very important to say about the subject of sanctification. Let's pray again and then hear God's word from Philippians 2. Heavenly Father, open your eyes to behold wonderful things in your word. We ask it through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. This is the word of God here at Philippians 2, 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. For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May he write its eternal truth upon all our hearts. Sanctification in the Christian life is a matter of growing in conformity to Christ. God wants to make us look like his son. So since H.B. isn't here, let me give you an H.B. Charles quote about this. H.B. says, it is the will of God that the spirit of God make the people of God look like the son of God by the word of God. So the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to make the people of God look like the Son of God. You see why you're really missing something when you don't have H.P. Charles. He says that I listen to his preaching just to hear those kinds of memorable phrases. He explains things in those kinds of memorable phrases. But that's a very, very important principle. It's God's will. that the Holy Spirit used the Scriptures to make us look like Jesus. That's a purpose of God in our lives. God wants us adopted sons. adopted children to look like his only begotten son. He wants us to be morally conformed to Jesus Christ. And that's what the doctrine of sanctification is about. And this morning, in the time that I have with you, I want to make 11 points. Don't worry, they're short. Derek knows that one night at First Perez, I stood up and I said, I have 24 points tonight. But because I love you, I'm only going to give you three. You'll have to read the rest. But these are 11 points on personal sanctification. And again, they'll be brief, but I hope that they will help us think about this important topic well together. So here's my first thesis on personal sanctification. Personal sanctification is a work of God's grace. Our catechism says that. It says justification is an act of God's free grace. Sanctification is a work of God's grace. It's important for us to remember this because here, let me say as a young Christian, and maybe more than a young Christian, I thought justification is something that God does, Sanctification is something that I do. But the emphasis of our catechism, because our catechism is trying to capture something that the New Testament says in numerous places, including Philippians 2.13, the catechism wants to emphasize, in the first instance, Sanctification is just as much God's work as justification is God's act. Personal sanctification is a work of God's grace. That is huge to get because sometimes it can sound like, okay, you're a Christian now, I've saved you, go be good. You're on your own. And it's very important to remember that that's not how it works in the New Testament. God is at work in you by his grace for your personal godliness. Personal sanctification is a work of God's grace. And that's something, frankly, I have to remind myself. Just like, I'll tell you, one of my besetting sins is worry. And I don't say that out of any sense of trying to sound spiritual,

but worry is a sin I struggle with. And so one of the things I have to do constantly is I have to remind myself not only of passages that tell me don't worry, and there are passages that tell you don't worry, but I have to remind myself of why I shouldn't worry. So passages like Psalm 23, 1 are very important to me. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. You hear the logic. Because you're my shepherd, Lord, I am not going to lack for anything I need. Therefore, I shouldn't worry. Or my God, shall supply all your needs. So the cure to my worry is not just the passages that tell me, don't worry about anything, but passages that explain to me that my God is my shepherd and he will supply my needs. So also in sanctification, we think, This is hard, Lord. It is hard to be like Jesus. It is hard to live out the gospel, to walk in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. When we're facing those difficulties, it's really important for us to remember It is a work of God's free grace in us for us to be able to grow in godliness. I want to remember that. There's so many challenges in living the Christian life. Don't forget that it's his work in you by grace that conforms you to the image of his son. God has not said, okay, I've justified you, sanctification, you're on your own. Nope, it's I justified you by grace, through faith, through Jesus Christ. Now, I am at work to make you like Jesus. It is my will to use the spirit who will use the word in order to make you look like the son. So there's my first thesis. Personal sanctification is the work of God's grace. Here's my second thesis. God is more interested in your personal sanctification than you are. God is more interested in you growing in godliness than you are interested in growing in godliness. Look, for the best of us, our attention to Christian growth, waxes and wanes. There are some times when we are really dialed in. We're disciplined. We're praying for God to be at work at us. We're reading his scriptures daily. We're praying consistently. We are seeing the spirit on the march in our personal lives. And then there are other times where we're AWOL. That is just the nature of the Christian life. God is persistently and consistently concerned for our sanctification even when we're not. You remember when President Bush said when we were beginning the war on terror that we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail? You remember that? And what did we do? We tired, we faltered, and we failed. God will not tire, he will not falter, and he will not fail. That's really good news. Sometimes I'm dialed in on wanting to grow in grace. Sometimes I'm dialed in on wanting to be like Jesus. But it waxes and it wanes. It never waxes and wanes with God. He never forgets. He never loses the plot. He never gets distracted. I feel like so much of my Christian life is squirrel, God is never like that. He is focused in earnest, and He's focused in earnest on every single one of us, which requires Him that He knows us, and He knows the peculiar and particular challenges that we have in our sanctification. Every one of you, every single one of you in this room has challenges in your sanctification that I do not have in mine. And I have challenges in my sanctification that you may praise God that you do not have in yours. God knows every single one of us. He knows what every single one of us needs. He is pursuing that. God is more interested in our personal sanctification than we are. That's really good news. That's my second thesis. That's something to remind yourself of. You know, in those moments when you sort of come back to yourself and you realize, you know, I've been walking far away from the Lord for I don't know how long now, and now I want to be near him, and I want to love him, and I want to commune with him. And that's a wonderful season when you come back from those wanderings. Sometimes you feel like the prodigal, don't you? Lord, you brought me home. It's a wonderful season, but here's the good news.

While you were out wandering, he was not. He was still at work in you. Third thesis. Personal sanctification is the personal work of the Holy Spirit. Personal sanctification is the personal work of the Holy Spirit. God has not left you to sanctify yourselves. He has given you his Holy Spirit who is personally at work in you to make you holy. I ran across this morning a quote from Thomas Boston that I had actually prepared for the lecture last year, but I don't think I used it. And I thought, how could I not have used that quote? It's amazing. Thomas Boston, famous Scottish minister, says this. In progressive sanctification, though the sinner does act toward sanctification, yet he acts not but as he is acted by the Holy Spirit. Oh, that's so good, listen to that again. In progressive sanctification, though the sinner does act toward his sanctification, yes, there are things, gotta pray. You gotta sit under the means of grace, hear the word preached into your soul. partake of the sacraments believingly, pray. There are lots of things to do that we're called to do in progressive sanctification, though the sinner does act toward his sanctification. Yet, he acts not, but as he is acted by the Holy Spirit. In other words, Whenever you do anything towards your growth in grace, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit is behind it. By the way, that's one reason why one urge that you should never, ever resist is the urge to pray. Whenever, whenever you have the urge to pray, you should do it. There are a lot of urges you have to resist in life. That is not one of them. And you can be sure that it is the Holy Spirit who is prompting you to pray. But behind every good desire in the Christian life will be the personal activity of the personal Holy Spirit. The old spiritual says, every time I feel the spirit moving in my heart, I will pray. But it's the spirit moving in our heart every time we want to do that which brings about the realization of God's purposes in our lives. Personal sanctification is the personal work of the Holy Spirit. Fourth thesis on sanctification. Your godliness is the result of and your response to the Spirit's work of personal sanctification, not the cause of your justification. And even mature Christians have to remind ourselves of this all the time. Your godliness is the result of and your response to the Spirit's work of personal sanctification, not the cause of your justification. Godliness is not why God has forgiven you. Your godliness is not why God has forgiven you. Your godliness is not why he has pardoned you. Your godliness is not why he has justified you and acquitted you and accepted you as righteous. No, it's for Christ's sake that you have been accepted as righteousness. And so your godliness is not the way that you got God to forgive you. It's the result of God having forgiven you. And that makes all the difference in the world. If you're trying to do something to get God to forgive and love you, it's going to kill you. Because you will never be able to do what is necessary to do that because he's already done it. He's already done it in Christ Jesus freely. He's done it. And so none of your godliness is to get God to forgive you and love you. It's the result of the fact that he has forgiven you and loved you. And that makes all the difference in the world. That sets you free. It sets you free. Augustine has a prayer that captures this. He prays, Lord, all the good in me is due to you. The rest is my fault. Isn't that good? Lord, all the good in me is due to you. The rest is my fault. So every time we see the seeds of godliness begin to grow in our lives, That's the result of God's work in us. That didn't get God to love us. That didn't get God to forgive us. That's the result of God's love and forgiveness. And he gets the credit for it. Lord, all the good in me is due to you. The rest is my fault. Fifth thesis on personal sanctification. And I really will get to the battle within killing sin before it kills you. That's in my, I've got that in there. So I promise you I'll

get there. But we gotta lay some foundations first. Your godliness, this is the fifth thesis, your godliness is indispensable to the Christian life. your godliness is indispensable to the Christian life. Matthew Henry once said that the business and hope of ministers is that we would assist our people in three ways. One, that we would assist our people in giving glory to God. Two, that we would assist our people in receiving grace from him. And number three, that we would assist our people in their keeping up their communion with God. Every minister is thinking about that all the time as he ministers. I assure you that Neil is thinking about that. Derek spent years thinking about that. Sinclair spent years thinking about that. Dick DeWitt spent years thinking about that. We can go on down the list. You've had ministers that care about you, and so they've wanted to minister to you so that you would give glory to God, so that you would receive grace, and so that you would keep up your communion with God. Because those things are indispensable for the Christian life. By the way, I heard Joel Beakey say not long ago, people probably ought to walk out of church from time to time thinking this. I think my pastor cares more about my soul than I care about my soul. And I think you've got those kinds of pastors at First Press. They really do care. They're not trying to get something out of you. They're trying to make sure you get something from God that only God can give you. so that you give glory to God, so that you receive grace from him, so that you keep up your communion with God. Those things, that's indispensable to the Christian life. So, personal sanctification, godliness, is indispensable to the Christian life. And so, your pastors, are gonna wanna cultivate that in your Christian. They care about justification and sanctification. By the way, they also, they care about justification, adoption, and sanctification. They care about all three of those. All three of those realities have an experiential effect in your life. Justification has the experiential effect of helping you more and more actually feel forgiven. Justification is objective, it's not subjective. In justification, you are forgiven, but what do you struggle with for a long time in the Christian life? Feeling like you're forgiven. Adoption is an objective thing. You are made the children of God, but it can take a long time in the Christian life to feel like you're the child of God. And so adoption is meant to produce eventually a full Christian experience. So is sanctification. So that you start to think, you know, Lord, I actually do love the things of God. I actually do love you more than I love the world. And those things are essential to Christian experience. And so personal sanctification is indispensable to the Christian life, to Christian experience. Number six, thesis number six, personal sanctification only happens by the means of grace. Go back to H.B.' 's phrase, it is the will of God that the spirit of God use the word of God to make the people of God look like the son of God. What does the spirit use? The word of God. He uses the means of grace in order to make us like Jesus. So personal sanctification only happens by the means of grace. And friends, that's one reason why we need the church. We need one another. In fact, I am struck by the fact that so many of the directives that we're given in the New Testament, you cannot do alone. Right? When we're told, love one another, guess what? You can't do that alone. There has to be another to love before you can do that. And so we need, when we're told, be patient. Okay, there's a cause of the need for patience out there. Oftentimes it's little feet running around your house, okay? or the person you live with named your husband or your wife or your mother or your father or your children. So much of the Christian life has to be lived in relation to others. And so sanctification can't happen without the church. We need the church and we need the church to grow

in grace. And look, every once in a while, we find that the church is the reason why we need to grow in grace. Don't be surprised when that happens. Normally, hopefully, in a good, healthy church, a church is a help to you in growing in grace. Occasionally, it will be a reason why you need to grow in grace. Don't be freaked out by that. That happens. But we need one another. If sanctification is by the means of grace, then we need the church, we need one another. Seventh thesis of sanctification. Sanctification happens at the level of our habits and instincts, our desires, our will, and our words and our actions. Now we're finally getting to the battle within. Everything else that I say in the rest of the theses have to do with that battle within. Okay? Sanctification happens at the level of our habits and instincts, our desires, our will, as well as our words and our actions. So, the wellspring of observable sanctification lies at the deepest seat of the soul. Yes, sanctification has to do with our public conduct. If you've been to the 830 service, you know that from Titus 3. If you haven't, I hope you will know it by the end of the 1115 service. God does care about our public conduct. He does care about our outward behavior, but that outward behavior starts inside. That's why Jesus says what he says in Matthew 15. It's not what goes into you that corrupts you. It's what comes out of you. So our outward activity, our outward words, our outward actions has a wellspring, and that wellspring is in the deepest seat of the soul. And so what that means is sanctification cannot ignore what is deep inside you. It cannot ignore your habits. I mean, a lot of my battle in godliness is battling bad habits. And those just get worked into your soul by your routine. Instincts. You know, I can remember my dad telling me, my dad passed away in 1992. He was a Marine in the Second World War. And I can remember him telling me how hard it was to learn to be dependent upon God. Because he was trained to think, I can do anything. I'm a Marine, I can do anything. And to get the mindset of, Lord, without you, I am nothing. Without you, I can't do anything. That was really hard for him. Instincts had been worked into him by his training that had spiritual ramifications. Our desires, what you want can kill you. The Greeks used to say, whom the gods would destroy, they answer their prayers. That's a dark saying, isn't it? Now, what does that mean? It means that sometimes what you want will destroy you. So having right desires is vitally important in the Christian life, and that happens within. Eighth thesis. Because of the ongoing reality of indwelling sin, and the ongoing reality of incomplete sanctification. So you got two realities you always have to remember. Number one, we still struggle with indwelling sin. As believers, we still struggle with sin. And there is this reality, our sanctification is not complete. So you got two ongoing realities, indwelling sin and incomplete sanctification. Because of that, we can be simultaneously advancing and declining in different areas of our Christian life at the same time. Now, that's sort of a good news, bad news kind of thesis, isn't it, right? The good news is that explains, Lord, why is it that I seem to be growing in this area, but in this area I'm further behind than I've ever been before? Because of indwelling sin and because of incomplete sanctification. That's an important reality for us to grapple with. Ninth thesis on sanctification. Sanctification often feels like death. Because it is. Now we're really to the title that I was given. Killing sin before it kills you. One aspect of sanctification is what our catechism and our confession of faith as well in the chapter on sanctification calls mortification. which means killing sin, okay? Sometimes sanctification feels like death because it is. What happens to the sins that have most closely wrapped themselves around us? is when we begin the process of killing those sins, it feels

like we are dying. And that is in part because we are dying. Those sins have become so much a part of our desires, so much a part of our instincts, so much part of our habits, we feel like we are dying. when we're killing that sin. And by the way, Satan wants to accentuate that feeling and say, no, no, don't do that, you'll kill yourself. When the irony is, if you don't kill the sin, you will die. But he doesn't want you to kill the sin. He wants you to die. And so you've got this twin reality. You feel like you're dying when you're attacking the sin. And he wants you to feel like you're dying so that you don't. But the spirit is warring in you against the flesh and against the world and against the devil. And he's saying, keep on killing the sin. You may think that you're dying, but this actually is life-giving. That's really hard. That's one of the rubber-meets-the-road parts of the Christian life. Sanctification often feels like death because it is. Tenth, self-awareness, sufficient self-knowledge is vital for sanctification. You've got to know yourself and know your instincts and your temptations to grow in grace. Oftentimes, you're relating to other people and you're thinking, do you even know yourself? But we need to make sure that we're looking in the mirror and that we know ourselves so that we know the likely areas of our greatest temptations and our greatest struggles. Calvin starts off the institutes this way. If you sit in on Derek Thomas' Calvin's Institutes class, he'll point out this is the way Calvin starts the institutes. Almost all the knowledge we possess consists in the knowledge of ourselves and the knowledge of God. And he doesn't mean that so we can kind of pat ourselves on the back. He's saying you've really, really got to know yourself to live the Christian life. Every single one of us is different. Every single one of us has a different set of temptations. Every single one of us have different experiences, and we respond to those experiences differently. Being self-aware is important for our sanctification. For instance, one of the things that Satan will often use to keep us from trusting God is our disappointments. So let me just ask you today, have you ever taken stock of what your disappointments are? Very often we feel generally disappointed and we haven't thought hard about what has disappointed us. Now, once you find what that disappointment is, I will guarantee that that is an area very deep and close to the deepest desires and wants and wishes and longings of your life. And very often, when that disappointment has led you to struggle in your trust with God, it is whatever that want is that hasn't been met in your life has assumed a level equal to or greater than God. You want that thing more than you want God. That's how sin works. Really, every sin is wanting something more than God. So you've got to know yourself. Where are the areas, Lord, where I'm tempted to want something more than you? Or you'll be ineffective in fighting the fight of faith. One last one. I got here, we're here, 11. 11, sanctification concerns our motivations. And if our motivations are wrong, we will be hobbled in the Christian life. It's really important that we get our motivations. It's not enough to do the right thing. We need to do the right thing for the right reason. Going back to what we said before, I've known people who have gone to the mission field, that's a good thing, because they were trying to feel like God loved them. and they wanted to do something for God that would make them feel like God loved them. Now, going to the mission field is a very good thing to do. Going to the mission field to try to get God to love you is a very bad idea. In fact, before you go to the mission field, I want you to know down to the level of your DNA that God loves you with an everlasting love through Jesus Christ so that you can love people who don't love you back. But if you're out there trying to feel like God loves you, it's going to hobble you in your Christian life. So,

sanctification concerns our motivations. It's not just what we do, it's why we do it. It's not just doing the right thing, it's doing the right thing for the right reasons. All of those, I think, are principles worth thinking about as we think about growing in godliness. And so many of the more the latter ones of those theses have to do with that inner warfare, that warfare within. And that's where the Christian life is won and lost. That's why, by the way, I think in Ephesians 3, 14 to 19 ought to be everybody's prayer in the battle against discouragement and the battle for sanctification. And Paul prays that the Holy Spirit would impart power in our inmost being so that Christ would dwell in our hearts by faith. And I think one reason why he does that is he knows the Christian life is fought in the heart. It's fought in the soul. It's fought at the level of the desires and the instincts and the habits. And he knows if you lose the battle there, you lose the battle everywhere. And so what does he pray? Holy Spirit, come into this person's life. and take hold of their desires in the deepest part of them so that they can win the fight of faith. May God bless you all, let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for this time together in your word and thinking about what you do in our growth in godliness and how you do it. By your spirit, grow us in grace. In Jesus' name, amen.