

—A Study of the Westminster Confession of Faith—

Sanctification WCF 13

Introduction

- The opening line of this Chapter reaches back to what was established in Chapter 10 on effectual calling and regeneration. This indicates that sanctification (like justification and adoption) inevitably flows out of the beginnings of our salvation as a natural and necessary consequent. It's impossible for a person to be regenerated and not sanctified (or justified or adopted, for that matter) because they are all inseparable acts of God in redeeming sinners.
- As it relates to salvation, sanctification refers to God making a regenerated person holy, not merely by setting Him apart to His service, but by the infusion of His transforming grace, which purifies him from the pollution of sin, and renews him in the whole man after His own image (1Th 5.23; 4.3)
- While justification and sanctification are inseparable blessings, it will help us to distinguish them.
 - They differ in their *order*: justification precedes sanctification in that a sinner is first pardoned and restored to the favor of God before the Spirit is given to renew Him more and more after His image.
 - They differ in their *object*: justification takes away the guilt of sin and the obligation to punishment; sanctification cleanses us from its stain and pollution. Thus justification changes our state, transferring us from a state of condemnation into a state of acceptance while sanctification changes our nature, making those holy who were by nature unholy.
 - They differ in their *form*: justification is a judicial act by which the sinner is pronounced righteous; sanctification is a physical or moral act, or rather a series of such acts, by which a change is effected in the qualities of the soul. Justification is therefore called an *act* to signify that it is perfected at once, while sanctification is called a *work* to signify that it is progressive. Justification is equal upon all believers, while sanctification differs in degree between believers.
 - Finally, they differ in their *matter*: in justification the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to us; in sanctification an inherent righteousness is communicated to us and worked within us, so that in justification we receive a title to heaven while in sanctification we are made fit for heaven.
- It will also help to distinguish sanctification and regeneration.
 - These two are not different in nature and kind (as do justification and sanctification) but rather parts of a whole. In regeneration there is an infusion of spiritual life into the soul, in which life all the graces or all the holy tempers of the Christian are virtually included. In sanctification, those graces are unfolded and matured and enter their native influence upon the conduct.
 - In regeneration the living seed is sown (1Jn 3.9) and begins to germinate and show itself above ground; in sanctification it grows up and yields fruit, in some thirty, in other sixty, and in still others a hundredfold (Phil 1.6).
 - In regeneration the new creature is formed, and although no feature of the new creature is lacking, they are all feeble and weak, for it is but a babe; but in sanctification the body grows in all its parts, acquires vigor and activity and advances towards the full stature of a man in Christ (Eph 4.11.13).
 - Although in regeneration all holy principles are infused into the soul, the change produced is only partial in relation to the whole man. No Christian grace is lacking in the regenerated man, but the graces are imperfect, and remaining depravity continues to operate—and sometimes prevails (Rom 7).
- Is sanctification a privilege or a duty? It's both, Phil 2.12-13.
 - As a privilege it's viewed as the work of God and as a duty it's viewed as the work of man, assisted by supernatural grace. As a *privilege* it's the subject of promise and of prayer (e.g. it is promised in Ezk 36.25-27 and Jn 17.17 and sought in Ps 119.34); as a *duty* it's required by the law (1Pet 1.16; Ezk 18.31; 2Cor 7.1) and is therefore the aim behind every diligent, believing, and dependent use of the means of grace (2Tim 3.16-17; Rom 6.3-6; 1Cor 10.16; Phil 4.6-7; 1Cor 9.24-27). Two things are therefore implied in sanctification: the mortification of sin and the increase of positive holiness (mortification and vivification).

Of Sanctification

I. Its Radical Character § 1

- A. The first thing we notice in this chapter on sanctification is that it treats to what the divines called “further sanctification”. This reveals that they viewed sanctification as being rooted in earlier act of God such that the aspects of decreasing sin and increasing holiness covered in this chapter grow out of that earlier act which secures both its possibility and certainty. What is that earlier act? Effectual calling, the fruit of which is regeneration.
1. As our entire salvation is comprehended and secured, as far as God’s concerned, in our election in His eternal decree, so it is comprehended and secured, as far as we’re concerned, in our effectual calling. As we learned in that chapter, since our effectual calling entails our being spiritually and inseparably united to Christ by the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, the process of redemption begun cannot but end in the purpose of it all, namely, our eternal glorification (Rom 8.30).
 2. Sanctification is therefore begun/secured in our effectual calling and regeneration, whereby the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds, changes our hearts/affections, renews our wills, and draws us unto Christ in faith. Having laid hold of Christ by faith and in love, the process of “further sanctification” then immediately begins.
 3. The Confession therefore distinguishes between an initial or definitive sanctification and an ongoing or progressive sanctification and in this chapter the concern is with our progressive sanctification.
- B. The second thing to notice is that our sanctification is said to be *really* and *personally* experienced. This is spoken in opposition to the Antinomian error, which taught that believers are sanctified only by the holiness of Christ being imputed to them and that there is no inherent holiness infused into them or required of them.
1. The divines confess that our sanctification is real and personal. It involves the mortification of sin in our own members (Rom 6.12-14; 8.13) and the manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit in our own lives and conduct (Gal 5.16, 22-25).
 2. Any honest reading of the Scriptures reveal that it is absurd to think that the believer’s holiness is only in Christ and judicially imputed to him. Holiness is everywhere expected of the believer himself (Heb 12.14; Phil 2.12) are the effects of the Holy Spirit living and working directly in the believer (Ezk 36.27; Phil 2.13).
- C. Thirdly, this progressive sanctification is said to be carried on or effectuated “*through* the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, *by* His Word and Spirit dwelling in them.” Hence two things come into view here:
1. Our sanctification is rooted in our union with Christ in his death and resurrection, Jn 17.19; Rom 6.5-14.
 - a) Our sanctification was one of the grand objects of Christ’s death, Tit 2.14. His death removed the curse which kept us under the dominion of sin and at a distance from God and brought us into a state of reconciliation in which we can receive the purifying graces of holiness, Heb 13.12. His death therefore brought us nigh to God, by removing the guilt of sin, in order that we might be sanctified by the removal of the pollution of sin.
 - b) Thus it is by our being united to Christ in His death that our sanctification is made possible. And as this sanctification involves not only the putting off of sin, but the putting on of righteousness, we were also united to Christ in His resurrection, Rom 6.10-12.
 - c) This is why without a saving interest in Christ all efforts at holiness fail and descend into either a proud self-righteousness or a despairing immorality. Holiness requires a Spiritual and believing participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.
 2. Our sanctification takes place within the context of the ministry of God’s word and the power of God’s Spirit, Jn 17.17-19; 1Pet 1.22; 2.2

- a) In regeneration all the graces and principles of holiness are implanted in the soul. But as these are infantile and weak, they must be nourished and cultivated if they are to grow and bear fruit.
 - (1) Although they cannot die (as they are the seed of God’s eternal, divine, and Spiritual life), without proper nourishment and cultivation, they can greatly weaken, wither, decay, and even be long buried by prevailing corruption as plants are by the winter snow.
 - (2) Thus we must recognize that sanctification is a duty as well as a privilege and we are called by it to work out our salvation, put on Christ, walk in the Spirit, and put to death the works of unrighteousness within us.
 - b) The means for this cultivation are the appointed means of grace provided universally to every believer and provided supremely in the ordinances of public worship—both of which are used and blessed by the Spirit of God indwelling them.
 - (1) These means include, preeminently, the Word (2Tim 3.16), sacraments (1Cor 10.16), and prayer (Eph 6.18), as well as the dispensations and discipline of providence (Rom 8.28; 5.3-5; Js 1.2-4), all of which must be received and improved upon by faith in Christ.
 - (2) The pattern to which the Spirit conforms the believer is Christ’s own person (Rom 8.29), as He has perfected holiness in our human nature.
 - (3) The rule to which the Spirit conforms him is the Word of God (2Tim 3.16-17; WSC 2).
 - c) It’s clear, then, that while we are passive with respect to our effectual calling and regeneration, which is our *initial* sanctification, once we’re indwelt by the Spirit of God we necessarily cooperate with the Spirit in our *progressive* sanctification. He gives the grace and prompts us in the exercise of it, but we ourselves exercise it, Ezk 36.27; Ps 110.3; Phil 2.12-13; Eph 2.10.
- D. Fourthly, this sanctification involves four key aspects:
1. The destruction of the dominion of “the whole body of sin”, Rom 6.5-6
 - a) As sin itself has been condemned with respect to believers (Rom 8.3) so sin’s *dominion* in believers is destroyed (Rom 6.6, 10-14). We are no longer the slaves of sin (i.e., those who are necessarily and totally obedient to it, see Rom 6.16) but are now slaves of righteousness (i.e., those who are necessarily—though not yet totally obedient to it) Rom 6.17-18, 20-23.
 - b) Whenever sin prevails in the believer it is because of our own surrender to it and not because of its power over us since that power has been broken by our union with Christ’s death (cf. 1Cor 10.13; Js 1.14-15).
 - c) Moreover, the sin that prevails over us is a crucified and therefore weakened foe (Rom 6.6). It simply does not have its original strength and may be resisted through faith, 1Jn 5.4
 2. The weakening and mortifying of “its several lusts”, Gal 5.24; Rom 8.13
 - a) We must not mistake the mortification of the body (the putting off of outward sins) for the mortification of sin (the putting of sin in both head, heart, and hand, cf. Mt 5.21-22, 27-28).
 - b) The mortification of sin is found in the hatred of it and not simply in the fear of its consequences. It is the fruit of love for God, who utterly abhors sin and whose will it is that we should purify ourselves from it through and through (1Th 4.3).
 - c) Mortification aims at uprooting not only gross sins recognized by those around us but all sin known to ourselves. It aims at nothing less than universal purification and is earnestly desirous that not a single stain of it be allowed to abide.
 - d) Mortification is carried on in the strength of the almighty Spirit of God, by the means which God has appointed, with the assistance which He graciously affords, by faith, prayer, watchfulness, and determined resistance.
 - e) Mortification is not the utter uprooting of sin, but the reduction of its influence within narrower bounds, for complete exemption from sin is unattainable in this life. As **Owen** once said, the only remedy for this body of death is the death of the body.

- f) Thus mortification is not the work of a day, but of a life. For sin is not yet as a dead man but is as a wounded man, enfeebled and weakened, but still capable of action and even of vigorous efforts. This requires us to be constantly on our guard, watching for opportunities to inflict new wounds which will, upon God's own promise, eventually terminate the struggle.
 - g) The believer's hope of success in mortification is never in his own efforts, but in the death of Christ by which the power of sin is broken and by which he has himself died to sin, Rom 7.25. By the grace of God the believer has died to sin's power and sin's power has died in him. And the more he lays aside every weight and the sin that so easily besets him, the more pure his conduct will become and the more free he will be from acts of sin.
 - h) Mortification will therefore wane in proportion to a believer's relaxing his views on the vileness and danger of sin and his hatred of its nature and influence. For mortification to be carried on in earnest and with efficacy, love for God and hatred of sin must wax and grow in tandem. Compromise and toe-dangling are deadly games to play with the old man.
3. The quickening and strengthening of "all saving graces", Col 1.11; Eph 3.16-19
- a) By virtue of the Spirit's indwelling, the believer has the seed of every grace within him. He is able to live righteously and bring forth the fruits of holiness. There is nothing at all to which the Lord calls him for which he does not have the resources in Christ. And in proportion as the power of sin is circumscribed, there's more room for these graces to grow and flourish. Thus in order for vivification to thrive, mortification must also thrive. The strength of the new man will advance as that of the old man declines.
 - b) The understanding of the believer is illumined more and more by the Word and Spirit of truth, Eph 1.17-18; Col 1.9-10
 - c) The will of the believer is rendered more and more conformable to the will of God—which is the essence of holiness, Job 1.21
 - d) All the principles and habits of holiness are strengthened, Gal 6.14
4. The practice of "true holiness", without which no man will see the Lord, 2Cor 7.1; Heb 12.14; 2Pet 1.5-10. Although our progressive sanctification is not the ground of our acceptance with God, yet it is absolutely essential to salvation as the necessary consequences of a gracious state of soul and the perpetually binding moral law of God, Gal 5.22-23; Eph 2.10; Jn 15.5-6, 14, 16.
- a) **Shaw**, "Holiness, thought it cannot give us a title to heaven, is indispensably necessary. It is necessary by a divine and unalterable constitution; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12.14). God has enacted it as an immutable law, that nothing which defiles shall enter into the heavenly city (Rev 21.27). It is necessary, also, as a preparative for heaven. It is the evidence of our title, and constitutes our fitness for enjoying the pleasures and engaging in the work of the heavenly world, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5.8)."

II. Its Total Character § 2

- A. The first thing to notice here is that sanctification is thorough, throughout the *whole* man.
- 1. Our sanctification reaches every faculty: our intellect, affections, and will, in both soul and body. There is no single part of us which Christ has not purchased by His atonement and therefore no single part of us which the Spirit neglects to sanctify, 1Th 5.23-24
 - 2. Moreover, as our depravity is total, so our sanctification (its reversal) must also be total. The depravity caused by sin is total (through the whole man), progressive (increasing in perversity and strength), and final (the destruction of body and soul). Likewise, God's purpose for sanctification in Christ is total, progressive, and final.
 - 3. Also, just as our depravity unmistakably alters the way we use our bodies so sanctification unmistakably alters the way we use our bodies. Our bodies must be made subject to the control of our sanctified will and all the members of our body are to be made instruments of righteousness unto God as those who are no longer under sin but under grace, Rom 6.12-14, 19; 2Cor 10.5; Phil 4.8; Col 3.1-3.

a) **Dick**, “Strictly speaking the body is not the subject of sanctification, because, being a material substance, it is susceptible neither of virtue nor of vice; but it is sanctified in this sense: that it is dedicated to the service of God and its organs and members, which were formerly employed in sinful actions, and were excitements to them, are converted into the instruments of righteousness.”

B. Secondly, though thorough it is *imperfect* in this life. In fact, it is imperfect in *every* area.

1. There have always been those who hold that perfection is attainable in this life. But they thereby prove that they are ignorant of both the Scriptures and their own hearts. They would have to lower the standard of holiness and narrow the demands of the divine law in order to hold such a claim. Let them consider Ecc 7.20; Js 3.2; and 1Jn 1.8, 10.

2. The Scriptures are replete with evidence that our sanctification, though *radical* in its work and *total* in its reach, is in this life *imperfect*. Perfect holiness is a privilege of the life to come.

3. Let us be clear, however, that while perfection is beyond our reach it is nevertheless our *aim*. We are to endeavor, by the strength of the Spirit and in a diligent use of the means of grace and watchfulness unto prayer, to obey *all* of God’s Commandments, with *all* of our hearts, *all* of the time. And it is in this “sincere endeavor after universal obedience out of an unfeigned love for God” that is sometimes called perfection or blamelessness in this life (Gen 6.9; 17.1; 2Sam 22.24, 33; Job 1.1, 8; Pss 19.13; 37.37; 119.1; *Lk* 1.6; 1Th 2.10; 5.23; 1Tim 3.10).

a) **Shaw**, “Every real Christian will certainly aspire after perfection, but none can attain to absolute perfection in this life.”

C. Thirdly, the reality of sanctification in the face of remaining corruption results in “a continual and irreconcilable *war*” between the flesh and the Spirit.

1. Since the body of death / old man is not immediately destroyed in our regeneration (cf. Rom 7.21-23) it necessarily follows that the law of the Spirit and the law of sin and death will come into constant, total, and radical conflict, Rom 7.23; Gal 5.17

a) These two opposing principles can only co-exist in the believer in a state of active antagonism, and as the one gains in prevalence the other must lose.

III. Its Progressive Character § 3

A. In our war with sin, sin will sometimes “much prevail”. Despite the many examples in Scripture of this truth, our own experience presents too many sad examples of the same, Ecc 7.20; 1Kgs 8.46

B. However, from a constant supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the gracious element in the believer’s nature prevails on the whole and will most certainly finally overcome, 1Jn 5.4; 3.9; Eph 5.25-27; 1Th 3.12-13; Jude 24; Phil 1.6.

C. Our sanctification, despite its many ups and downs, is therefore *progressive* and cannot fail to reach its end, which is: our eternal life in heaven with God, Rom 5.21; 6.22-23; Gal 6.8; Tit 1.1-2.

D. **Ferguson**, “Regeneration is here to stay. The grace of God has become the possessor of the believer and sin has become an unwelcome lodger and sin will eventually get the boot. Even the stubbornness of indwelling sin shouldn’t be mistaken for what will ultimately prevail.”

E. *Therefore* let us diligently take up the appointed means and earnestly follow holiness (Mt 11.12). It is the will of God (1Th 4.3) and it is the command of God (1Pet 1.16). Moreover, all those whom He ordained to glory He also chose to holiness as the means, without which no one shall ever attain glory (Eph 1.4). Furthermore, our holiness is the goal of our redemption by Christ (Eph 5.25-27). He died not only to save us from wrath but to save us from sin (2Cor 7.1).

1. **Shaw**, “Presumptuous and delusive is that hope of seeing Christ hereafter, which does not produce an ardent desire and earnest endeavor to be conformed to Him here.”

2. Ever run from all teaching whatsoever which nurses and allows sin in any part of your conduct. Instead, seek after and hang upon that preaching, teaching, and literature which exalts Christ and holiness, humbles you, and paints sin the darkest and most vile of colors.

Bibliography:

An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Robert Shaw
The Confession of Faith, A. A. Hodge
Confessing the Faith, Chad Van Dixhoorn
Lectures on Theology Vol. 3, John Dick
Westminster Standards class at WTS 2001, Sinclair Ferguson

Assignments:

*Read Chapter 13 in Hodge
*Read Chapter 13 in the WCF
*Memory work: 2Th 2.13; Rom 6.6; 8.13; Gal 5.24; 1Jn 5.4; 2Cor 3.18; 2Cor 7.1

—The next class will meet, DV, at 8AM on **16 Jan** for a study of Calvin's life, ministry, and influence, taught by Micah Shin.