

WCF 13: OF SANCTIFICATION

Introduction

To sanctify is to ‘make holy.’ Sanctification is the divine process by which we are made holy or righteous.

One of the major errors of Roman Catholicism is the confusion of justification with sanctification. Justification, we must remember, is declarative. It is righteousness imputed. Sanctification on the other hand involves actual change in our souls. It is righteousness infused.

One of the major errors of ‘parachurch easy-believism’ today is also a failure to understand the place of justification and sanctification in the Christian life. We are not saved simply by a sinner’s prayer that makes us justified. Unless we are also sanctified and being sanctified, we can have no assurance that we are justified.

In this chapter, these errors are dealt with by a positive biblical exposition of the doctrine of sanctification.

1. On the Nature of Sanctification

13.1 They who are once effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are farther sanctified really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection,¹ by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them;² the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed,³ and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified,⁴ and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces,⁵ to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.⁶

¹1 Cor 6:11; Acts 20:32; Phil 3:10; Rom 6:5–6; ²Jn 17:17; Eph 5:26; 2 Thes 2:13; ³Rom 6:6, 14; ⁴Gal 5:24; Rom 8:13; ⁵Col 1:11; Eph 3:16–19; ⁶2 Cor 7:1; Heb 12:14.

- We have seen effectual calling, regeneration, justification and adoption in the *ordo salutis* thus far. As the Confession comes to the subject of sanctification, notice that reference is not made to justification but to effectual calling and regeneration. The reason for this is that justification is a declarative act of God outside the sinner. The sinner is declared to be righteous by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness upon him. He does not actually becomes righteous, but is given a status of righteousness on account of the work of Christ. Justification, therefore does not logically lead to sanctification, though those who are justified will immediately and inevitably begin the process of sanctification. On the other hand, effectual calling and regeneration have to do with a real change in the soul,—“having a new heart and a new spirit created in them” and so provides the logical and necessary beginning of sanctification.
- WSC 35. What is sanctification?
A. Sanctification is *the work of God’s free grace*,¹ whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the **IMAGE OF GOD**,² and are enabled more and more to *die unto sin, and live unto righteousness*.³
¹2 Thes 2:13; ²Eph 4:23–24; ³Rom 6:4, 6; 8:1.
- It is instructive to compare the difference between sanctification and justification:

	Justification	Sanctification
Nature	A declarative act	An actual work on the soul
Matter	Righteousness of Christ Imputed	Inherent righteousness Imparted
Time Frame	Punctiliar, at once	Progressive, over a life time
Result	Title to heaven	Meetness for, and capacity of enjoying heaven.

- It is described in WSC 35 as a *work* rather than an *act* as with justification and adoption (WSC 33–34) because it is a continuous and gradual operation of God the Holy Spirit in the soul of the justified sinner. Paul tells us that we are chosen “to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit” (2 Thes 2:13). Paul is of course speaking of salvation as a process leading to our glorification at the end of this life’s journey.

- Positively, sanctification consists in our being “renewed in the whole man after the image of God.” In other words, we are being restored to the state that Adam and Eve were in, when they were first created in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. This is accomplished, in the words of our Confession, by our being “more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness” (cf. Col 1:11; Eph 3:16–19).
- Negatively, sanctification involves the destruction of the “dominion of the whole body of sin” and the progressive weakening and mortification (putting to death) of the sinful passions related to body of sin (Rom 6:6; Gal 5:24; Rom 8:13). *WSC* 35 speaks of our being “enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” In other words, we are more and more purified from the pollution of sin and made more and more to hate sin, while at the same time growing to love righteousness and finding it more and more in our nature to practise holiness.

1. On the Extent & Process of Sanctification

13.2 This sanctification is throughout in the whole man,¹ yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part:² whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.³

¹1 Th 5:23; ²1 Jn 1:10; Rom 7:18, 23; Phil 3:12; ³Gal 5:17; 1 Pet 2:11.

- The *extent* of sanctification is the “whole man”—including all the faculties of the soul, such as the conscience, the intellect and the affections, and all the members of the body: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th 5:23). Sanctification enlightens the blindness of our minds; softens the hardness of conscience; and subdues our sinful passions. “As our bodies are integral parts of our persons, their instincts and appetites act immediately upon the passions of our souls; and hence they must be brought subject to the control of the sanctified will, and all the members of the body, as organs of the soul, made instruments of righteousness unto God” (Hodge, 198). Thus Paul commands: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of un-righteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13; cf. 1 Th 4:4).

- Throughout the *process* of sanctification,—because of the remnant of our corrupt nature,—a fierce struggle ensues between our flesh and the Spirit. Paul speaks of this struggle in Galatians 5:17,—

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

There is war, in other words, between the Spirit and the flesh. But what are the Spirit and the flesh? In the first place, Paul is not referring to a battle between the soul and the body. Those who teach that there is such a battle falls into the error of Gnostic dualism. No, no; our soul and body is one, they do not war against each other. In is with some perceptive decisiveness that our translators (and for that matter, all translators of modern Bible versions) capitalised the ‘Spirit’ in the translation. However, in the second place, I do not think that Paul is speaking about a direct battle between the Holy Spirit and our flesh (whatever the flesh is). If the Spirit is in direct battle, He will win instantly. I believe, rather, that the Spirit refers to the regenerate part of our nature that is under the influence of the indwelling Spirit, whereas the flesh refers to the remnant of our old nature.

Note that this does not mean that there are two natures in us, but that the regenerate man will constantly struggle against temptations that arise out of the remnant of corrupt nature.

13.3 In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail,¹ yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome:² and so, the saints grow in grace,³ perfecting holiness in the fear of God.⁴

¹Rom 7:23; ²Rom 6:14; 1 Jn 5:4; Eph 4:15–16; ³2 Pet 3:18; 2 Cor 3:18; ⁴2 Cor 7:1.

Notwithstanding the fierceness of the battle between the Spirit and the flesh, the *effectiveness* of sanctification can be seen in the Christian’s victory over sin. Our Confession puts it this way: “through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome, and so

the saint grows in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.” In other words, the Christian should normally be victorious in his struggle against sin. Paul speaks about this victory in Romans 6:14, “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.” John confirms: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 Jn 5:4). A defeated Christian is a contradiction of terms. However, a Christian cannot attain perfection in this life because of the corruption of nature.

But to further clarify our understanding in regard to sanctification, we must understand that:

- The *impulsive* or moving cause of sanctification is the free grace of God: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit 3:5).
- The *meritorious* cause is the death and resurrection of Christ: “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14).
- The *efficient* cause or Agency of sanctification is the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believers: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11; cf. 2 Thes 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2).
- Therefore God, and not man, is the *author* of sanctification. But this does not mean that man is entirely passive in the process. He can and should actively participate in God’s work of sanctification by the exercise of faith and the diligent use of the means that God has placed at his disposal. Thus Paul urges the Christians: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12–13). Indeed ...
- Faith in Christ may be known as the *instrumental* cause of our sanctification. Thus Peter, referring to the Holy Spirit’s work in the hearts of the Gentiles, notes that He was “purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). Similarly the Lord commissioned Paul to minister to the Gentiles, that they may have an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Him (Acts 26:18).
- The *means* of grace, or of sanctification include:
 - (1) The Word read and preached: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (Jn 17:17; cf. 1 Pet 2:2);
 - (2) The sacraments: Peter speaks of baptism as saving us by the resurrection of Christ as an “answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Pet 3:21). Surely he is not teaching baptismal regeneration, but speaking of salvation as incorporating sanctification. Paul admonished the Corinthians for coming together for the Lord’s Supper “not for the better, but for the worse” (1 Cor 11:17), which clearly implies the spiritual benefits of partaking the Lord’s Supper;
 - (3) Prayer: “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (Jn 14:13–14);
 - (4) Discipline of God’s providence: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom 5:3–4; cf. Jn 15:2; Heb 12:5–11).
- It is instructive also to understand the different errors pertaining to sanctification.

Pelagian View	Every man is always perfectly to do all that is required of him in the law since the law only regulates outward behaviour. (But see Rom 7:7).
Romish View	A sinner is justified by righteousness of Christ imputed and actual righteousness infused (sanctification). Concupiscence (tendency to sin and thoughts of sinning) is not sin, therefore it is possible to attain perfection.
Antinomian view	Believers are sanctified only by the holiness of Christ imputed, no inherent holiness is imparted to them.
Wesleyan View	Believers can achieve ‘entire sanctification’ or freedom from all wilful sin in this life (Teaches the same as RC on matter of concupiscence)
Keswick View	‘Normal’ Christians should have sustained victory over known sin. Many are unsundered Christians, they need a crisis experience to turn them

	back to God. But who can love the Lord and our neighbours perfectly? What sin is not wilful?
Pentecostal View	Every Christian must be baptised by the Holy Spirit subsequent to his initial conversion. This Baptism of the Spirit removes Original Sin or the tendency to sin entirely.
Dispensational View	The Christian has two natures (flesh and spirit) just like Christ has two nature (human and divine). These two natures are constantly at war until flesh is eradicated at death. Sanctification is the Christian choosing more and more to act according to the new nature (which does not sin). A Christian can accept Jesus Christ as Saviour without accepting Him as Lord. Such a person is known as a carnal Christian.