

The Theology of the Westminster Standards WCF 13.2 – The Battle of Sanctification (Part 2)

“Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” (WSC 35)

“I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.” – John Newton

I. Review: The Nature of Sanctification

A. Sanctification is a benefit of our union with Christ, flowing from the power of his death and resurrection for us, receive through faith.

1. **Acts 26:18** – “... *that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*”

B. “Definitive” Sanctification is the once-for-all breach with sin as an enslaving power.

“To convince those in whom sin evidently hath the dominion that such is indeed is their state and condition ... [and] To satisfy some that sin hath not the dominion over them, notwithstanding its restless acting in them and warring against their souls; yet unless this can be done, it is impossible that they should enjoy peace and comfort in this life.” – John Owen, Works, 7:517

C. “Progressive” Sanctification is a (Slow) Process

1. Mortification: the gradual weakening of sin’s influence through a constant watchfulness and fighting against sin by the power of Christ’s death applied to us, such that we see (maybe over a long period of time!) an increasing measure of success.
2. Vivification: the gradual enlivening of our hearts to greater degrees of glory, beauty in us by the power of Christ’s resurrection applied to us, such that we experience (maybe over a long period of time!) an increasing enjoyment of God.

II. WCF 13.2 – The Extent and Imperfection of Sanctification

“This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.” (WCF 13.2)

A. What do you remember as some of the practical implications of the fact that sanctification is “throughout, in the whole man”? What about that it is “yet imperfect in this life”?

“Let each one of us, then, proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey we have begun ... And let us not despair at the slowness of our success; for even though attainment may not correspond to desire, when today outstrips yesterday the effort is not lost.” – John Calvin, Institutes, III.6.5

“You shouldn’t take your spiritual temperature every day. You need to look for progress over months and years, not by minutes and hours.” – Kevin DeYoung, The Hole in our Holiness, 138

B. Why do you think the war is “irreconcilable”? What does this teach us about the character of sin?

1. **Rom 7:22–23** – “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”

“As every drop of poison is poison, and will infect, and every spark of fire is fire, and will burn; so is every thing of the law of sin, the last, the least of it,—it is enmity, it will poison, it will burn.” – John Owen, *Works*, 6:177

C. WCF 13.2 says this irreconcilable war is between “the flesh” and “the Spirit”? How are these “battle lines” encouraging to you?

Eph 5:29–30 – “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.”

1 John 4:2 – “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God ...”

Rom 7:18 – “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.”

Gal 5:13 – “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

1. **Rom 8:8–10** – “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

D. Read Gal 5:16–24 below. Why does Paul speak of the “fruit” of the Spirit? What are some of the “works of the flesh” you must mortify this week?

1. **Gal 5:16–24** – “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”