

The Theology of the Westminster Standards

WCF 13.3 – The Battle of Sanctification (Part 3)

“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. Review

A. The Nature of Sanctification

1. Sanctification is a benefit of our union with Christ, flowing from the power of his death and resurrection for us, receive through faith.
2. Sanctification reminds us that the gospel of grace does not deny the role of the (moral) law for the Christian!
 - a. **Rom 3:21** – *“Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.”*
 - b. **Rom 8:3–4** – *“By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”*

*A rigid master was the law, Demanding brick, denying straw;
But when with gospel-tongue it sings, It bids me fly, and gives me wings.
– From “Gospel Sonnets,” by Ralph Erskine*

B. Progressive Sanctification as Warfare

“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)

1. The profound deceitfulness and power of sin

- a. **John 8:33-34** – *“[The Jews] answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, “You will become free”?’ ³⁴ Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.’”*

*“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*

“Sanctification is therefore the consistent practical outworking of what it means to belong to the new creation in Christ.” – Sinclair Ferguson, Christian Spirituality, p. 60)

2. The opposition we face ...

- a. **2 Tim 3:12–14** – “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed ...”
- b. **1 Pet 5:8** – “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”
- c. **Gal 5:17** – “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh ...”

II. WCF 13.3 – The Eventual Overcoming in the War of Sanctification

“In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (WCF 13.3)

- A. How should the biblical truth of WCF 13.3 help us when we relapse into the same sin? How should we respond when our desire to grow in grace wanes?

“The true church is Christ’s body. Not one bone in that mystical body shall ever be broken. The true church is Christ’s bride. Those whom God hath joined in everlasting covenant shall never be put asunder . . . The true church is Christ’s army. The Captain of our salvation loses none of His soldiers. His plans are never defeated. His supplies never fail . . . He to whom you commit your soul has all power in heaven and earth, and He will keep you. He will never let you be cast away. Relatives may oppose. Neighbours may mock. The world may slander, and ridicule, and jest, and sneer. Fear not! Fear not! The powers of hell shall never prevail against your soul. Greater is He that is for you than all they that are against you.” (Ryle, Holiness, 269).

- B. WCF 13.3 teaches that in the battle of sanctification—despite setbacks (!)—the “regenerate part doth overcome”? What is the basis for this claim? How is this an encouragement to you?

“Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of your sin. His blood is the great remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and you will die a conqueror; yea, you will, through the good providence of God, live to see your lust dead at your feet.” – John Owen, Works, VI:79

“[N]ever any soul did or shall perish by the power of any lust, sin, or corruption, who could raise his soul by faith to an expectation of relief from Jesus Christ” (Works, VI, 82).