

SESSION 14: Living in Redemption

Readings

Smith, *Harmony of the Westminster Standards*, 54-55, 58-62

WCF	WLC	WSC
13, 15, 16	75-78	35-36, 87

Introduction

We are in the midst of unfolding how redemption accomplished (*historia salutis*) is applied to us personally (*ordo salutis*). Effectual calling unites us to Christ. In union with Christ we “partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them,” (WSC 32). In our last session, we considered justification, adoption, and faith. In this session, we consider sanctification and its two facets: repentance and good works.

Sanctification is Identification¹⁷⁶

The title of this session comes from OPC minister Steven Miller, who once described sanctification to the present author as, “living in redemption.” Unlike justification and adoption, both of which are defined as “an act” (cf. WSC 33, 34), sanctification is “the *work* of God’s free grace,” (WSC 35).

As the work of God’s free grace, sanctification stands in direct connection to the work of Christ. God the Holy Spirit is “applying death and resurrection of Christ” (WLC 75) to us. It is “through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection” (WCF 13.1) that 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).

Sanctification is also directly connected to our union with Christ. The moment we first believe, the moment we are “once effectually called, and regenerated,” we are set apart to God in Christ and have made a principial break with sin. In the eyes of God and the language of Scripture, we are moved from the category of ‘sinner’ to the category of ‘saint’. Theologians refer to this as *definitive sanctification* (1Cor 6.11). Conceptually, it is closely connected to adoption (Jn 1.12).

Definitive sanctification doesn’t mean we never sin. What it means is that sin no longer defines us. “A saint does sin. But a Christian is one who has *saint* as their constant identity and *sinner* as their occasional activity. For the Christian, there is a vital difference between *having* sin and *being* sin.”¹⁷⁷ “It is one thing for sin to live in us: it is another for us to live in sin. It is one thing for the enemy to occupy the capital; it is another for his defeated hosts to harass the garrisons of the kingdom.”¹⁷⁸

First and foremost, then, the Christian life is about *living consistently with our new identity*. Every day we must draw our identity not from the surrounding noise, but from our eternal destiny. When tempted to sin, we tell ourselves, “This isn’t me. Sin is no longer who I am. In Jesus I am a saint, and saints live differently.” Sanctification is thus actively rooted in *remembering who we are in Christ*.

¹⁷⁶ This section is a refresher on what discussed under “Gospel Identity” in session 12.

¹⁷⁷ Mark Driscoll, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, 35.

¹⁷⁸ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 145.

Sanctification is Distinct

In speaking of sanctification, we must make several necessary distinctions. The first is between *definitive* and *progressive* sanctification. In the former we are set apart, whereas in the latter we are taken apart – and put back together. In this sense, sanctification is more than an *identity redefinition*. It is a *progressive renovation*. C.S. Lewis makes this point particularly well:

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.¹⁷⁹

Progressive sanctification is all-encompassing in its scope, yet always imperfect in this life. It is all-encompassing because God the Holy Spirit permeates and saturates us, renewing us “in the whole man after the image of God,” (Eph 4.23-24, Col 3.9-10). Yet it is always imperfect in this life because there abides “some remnants of corruption in every part,” (WCF 13.2).

Our standards make four important distinctions between justification and sanctification in WLC 77. The following chart breaks these out:

	Justification	Sanctification
What God Does	Righteousness imputed	Grace infused
What We Experience	Sin pardoned	Sin subdued
Level of Completion	Perfect now	Imperfect in this life
Relative Progress	Equal for all Christians	Unequal among Christians

Sanctification is *the work of God*. Paul urges the Philippians, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure,” (2.12-13). We do not sanctify ourselves. “Sanctification is not working out grace, but working out salvation – bringing into expression the salvation that God has worked in us.”¹⁸⁰

Yet sanctification is *the Christian’s responsibility*. “We commune with God to receive that which transforms, then we bring out the fruit. We eat to grow, but cannot make ourselves grow; we grow because we are connected to the root – because we are alive.”¹⁸¹

Sanctification is Warfare

In Galatians 5.17, Paul writes, “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.” Likewise Peter in his first epistle writes, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul,” (1Pet 2.11).

Citing these verses, WCF 13.2 asserts that sanctification involves “irreconcilable war.” And WCF 13.3 tells us that like any war, sanctification may involve personal defeats: “the remaining

¹⁷⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 173.

¹⁸⁰ Steven Miller, personal conversation with the present author.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

corruption, for a time, may much prevail.” Nevertheless, the overall conflict sweeps – slowly, yet inexorably – toward victory: “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.”

In this conflict, we have two great allies: the gift of a new heart, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Regarding the former, we have already discussed how the regenerate heart has an innate desire to please God and how we may appeal to the affections.¹⁸² Regarding the latter, we should note two things. Firstly, the Holy Spirit *abides* with us (1Jn 3.9). We are never alone. Secondly, the Holy Spirit works supernaturally through *ordinary means*.¹⁸³

Like all forms of warfare, sanctification involves certain active strategies. Battles are not won by mere identification of the enemy. Battles are won by defensive and offensive combat. The same is true spiritually. Sin must not be merely identified – it must be killed. This requires that Christians active engage in *mortification* (repentance) and *vivification* (good works). It is to our standards’ discussion of these topics that we now turn.

Repentance

One of the best definitions of repentance is that found in WSC 87: “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.”

Repentance is the fruit of faith. “That repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it, ought to be without controversy.”¹⁸⁴ “The interdependence of faith and repentance can be readily seen when we remember that faith is faith in Christ for salvation from sin.”¹⁸⁵

Repentance begins with *perception* (WCF 15.2). On one hand, we must acquire “the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness” of our sins. Sin isn’t bad because it makes us uncomfortable. Too often it does not! Sin is bad because it is “contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God.” On the other hand, we must apprehend the better vision of God’s “mercy in Christ to such as are penitent.”

Following perception, repentance must continue with the *affections*. Seeing both his sin and God’s better way, the Christian “grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavoring to walk with him in all the ways of his commandments.”

Repentance must also be *particular* (WCF 15.5). “Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man’s duty to endeavour to repent of his particular sins particularly.” It is not for no reason that the ancients attributed great power to the knowledge of a thing or person’s name (cf. Mk 1.24, Mk 5.9-10). The proof texts cite Zacchaeus and Paul. Both of these men owned their sins before the Lord, and both of them received mercy. There is nothing quite like naming our sins – before God and, when appropriate or necessary, before others (WCF 15.6) – to bring out their odiousness. Sin is like a vampire: it cannot endure the light of full day.

¹⁸² See our previous discussion under “Human Freedom and Man’s Fourfold State” in session eight.

¹⁸³ See WSC 85 and 88, with their corresponding proof texts. Consider Paul’s list of “the whole armor of God” in Ephesians 6.11-18. Are any of the items listed not accessible by faith through the diligent use of the Word, sacraments, and prayer? How much slowness in our sanctification is due to us grieving the Spirit by neglecting the ordinary means?

¹⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.1.

¹⁸⁵ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 113.

Finally, repentance involves *confidence* (WCF 15.4). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” (1 John 1.9). There is no fine print.

The Practice of Mortification

How do we put all this together, practically? Sinclair Ferguson gives us an outline:¹⁸⁶

1. *Turn to the Scriptures.* Consult passages such as Romans 8.13, 13.8-14; 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1; Ephesians 4.17-5.21; Colossians 4.1-17; 1 Peter 4.1-11; 1 John 2.28-3.11. Colossians 3.1-17 is a good place to begin.
2. *Know, rest in, think through, and act upon your new identity – you are in Christ* (Col 3.1-4). “Failure to deal with the presence of sin can often be traced back to spiritual amnesia, forgetfulness of our new, true, real identity. As a believer I am someone who has been delivered from the dominion of sin and who therefore is free and motivated to fight against the remnants of sin’s army in my heart.”
3. *Expose the working of sin in every area of your life* (Col 3.5-11). “If we are to deal with sin biblically, we must not make the mistake of thinking that we can limit our attack to only one area of failure in our lives. All sin must be dealt with... The challenge in mortification is akin to the challenge in dieting (itself a form of mortification!): once we begin we discover that there are all kinds of reasons we are overweight. We are really dealing with ourselves, not simply with calorie control. I am the problem, not the potato chips! Mortifying sin is a whole-of-life change.”
4. *Admit sin for what it really is. Call a spade a spade* (Col 3.5). “Call it ‘sexual immorality,’ not ‘I’m being tempted a little’; call it ‘impurity,’ not ‘I’m struggling with my thought life’; call it ‘evil desire, which is idolatry,’ not ‘I think I need to order my priorities a bit better.’ This pattern runs right through this whole section. How powerfully this unmasks self-deceit — and helps us to unmask sin lurking in the hidden corners of our hearts!”
5. *See sin for what your sin really is in God’s presence* (Col 3.6). “The masters of the spiritual life spoke of dragging our lusts (kicking and screaming, though they be) to the cross, to a wrath-bearing Christ. My sin leads to — not lasting pleasure — but holy divine displeasure. See the true nature of your sin in the light of its punishment... Take a heaven’s-eye view of sin and feel the shame of that in which you once walked.”
6. *Recognize the inconsistency of your sin* (Col 3.9-10). “You put off the ‘old man,’ and have put on the ‘new man’... New men live new lives. Anything less than this is a contradiction of who I am ‘in Christ.’”
7. *Put sin to death* (Col 3.5). “It is as ‘simple’ as that. Refuse it, starve it, and reject it. You cannot “mortify” sin without the pain of the kill. There is no other way!”
8. *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Col 3.12-17; cf. Rom 13.14). “Sweeping the house clean simply leaves us open to a further invasion of sin. But when we understand the “glorious exchange” principle of the Gospel of grace, then we will begin to make some real advance in holiness. As sinful desires and habits are not only rejected, but exchanged for Christ-like graces (3:12) and actions (3:13); as we are clothed in Christ’s character and His graces are held together by love (v. 14), not only in our private life but also in the church fellowship (vv. 12–16), Christ’s name and glory are manifested and exalted in and among us (3:17).”¹⁸⁷

Good Works

As vivification is the necessary associate of mortification, so good works are the inseparable corollary of repentance. We are not saved *by* works, but we are saved *for* them (Eph 2.8-10). Accordingly, the seven paragraphs in WCF 16 outline seven key points on good works:

1. *Good works are defined by God.* Good intentions do not make good works. God alone defines the standard of what is good.
2. *Good works are the fruit and evidence of faith.* Good works do not justify us before God (Rom 4.3), but they are the evidence of living faith (Jas 2.26).
3. *Good works require an actual influence of the Holy Spirit* (Phil 2.13, 4.13).

¹⁸⁶ This section culled from “The Practice of Mortification,” <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/practice-mortification/> (accessed March 26, 2013).

¹⁸⁷ Here Ferguson’s argument echoes Chalmers’s “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.”

4. *No Christian in this life ever does all, let alone more, than God requires.* The idea that any saint could ever contribute to a “treasury of merit” is nonsense (Lk 17.10).
5. *Good works never merit forgiveness or eternal life* (Is 64.6). Our “good works” are never wholly good. When it comes to good works, God gets all glory for the good, and we get all blame for the bad.
6. *A Christian’s good works are graciously accepted and rewarded in Christ.* John Murray wrote:

While it makes void the gospel to introduce works in connection with justification, nevertheless works done in faith, from the motive of love to God, in obedience to the revealed will of God and to the end of his glory are intrinsically good and acceptable to God. As such they will be the criterion of reward in the life to come. This is apparent from such passages as Matthew 10:41; 1 Corinthians 3:8-9, 11-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:7. We must maintain therefore, justification complete and irrevocable by grace through faith and apart from works, and at the same time, future reward according to works. In reference to these two doctrines it is important to observe the following:

(i) This future reward is not justification and contributes nothing to that which constitutes justification. (ii) This future reward is not salvation. Salvation is by grace and it is not as a reward for works that we are saved. (iii) The reward has reference to the station a person is to occupy in glory and does not have reference to the gift of glory itself. While the reward is of grace yet the standard or criterion of judgment by which the degree of reward is to be determined is good works. (iv) This reward is not administered because good works earn or merit reward, but because God is graciously pleased to reward them. That is to say it is a reward of grace. In the Romish scheme good works have real merit and constitute the ground of the title to everlasting life. The good works are rewarded because they are intrinsically good and well-pleasing to God. They are not rewarded because they earn reward but they are rewarded only as labour, work or service that is the fruit of God’s grace, conformed to his will and therefore intrinsically good and well-pleasing to him. They could not even be rewarded of grace if they were principally and intrinsically evil.¹⁸⁸

7. *The works of unbelievers are always sinful* (Rom 14.23b, Heb 11.6).

Important Questions

1. The Roman Catholic Church teaches, “Justification *detaches man from sin* which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin.”¹⁸⁹ It further teaches, “Justification establishes *cooperation between God’s grace and man’s freedom*. On man’s part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.”¹⁹⁰ How do these statements manifest a confusion of justification and sanctification?
2. How do the distinctions surrounding sanctification help us guard against perfectionism (Rom 7.21-25), pietism (Heb 5.12-14), and quietism (Heb 12.14)?
3. As we compare our own approach to mortification of sin with the process outlined by Ferguson, which steps are we most likely to miss?

Additional Resources

n/a

For Next Session

Smith, *Harmony of the Westminster Standards*, 63-66, which covers:

WCF	WLC	WSC
17-18	79-81	

¹⁸⁸ John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 221-222.

¹⁸⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), #1990.

¹⁹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1993.