

Text

Phil 2:12-13

¹² 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, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Pray

Main Point

Introduction (300)

Hook

Have you ever thought of how awesome it is to do something that requires a huge amount of effort, while knowing the results don't come from your efforts?

You give your all, you work hard, but you know the end results do not come from your efforts?

Gardening is like that.

You sweat away tilling the soil, fertilising, planting seed, pulling out the weeds and watering regularly.

You put in the effort to grow those tomatoes.

But reality is you are not the one who made the seed germinate, you are not the one who makes the tomato plant grow nor the one who causes the fruit to ripen. God makes that happen.

Yet your efforts are indispensable to a good crop (as all good gardeners will assure us.)

You work and God works.

Today we continue our study in the 1689, and we come to the chapter on Sanctification. And we will see that Sanctification is a bit like gardening in that respect: You work and God works.

Wayne Grudem defined it this way: “Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man, that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives”.

The process of sanctification is the reality in which every Christian find themselves. If you are a Christian, you are on that road.

It is a huge topic that gives us much hope in this sin-stained world, and also much challenge as we consider our part to play.

The confession does not go into the nitty-gritty of Sanctification, but highlights the key truths, the big principles of Sanctification. The skeleton, if you like, that support all of us as we all battle with specific sins in specific ways.

Outline

I am going to divide this study in the way the confession divides this chapter. (Chapter 13)

First, we will see the **Definition of Sanctification**
(pr1)

Then the **Duration of Sanctification** (pr2)
(Highlighting the fact that we will not be perfected until we die, or Jesus returns)

And finally, **the Direction of Sanctification** (pr3)
(Making it clear that there is a continuous increase in sanctification in the life of a Christian, although sin remains)

Part 1 – The Definition of Sanctification

From the Confession

So let us begin with our First part, The Definition of Sanctification.

If you have a confession with you turn to chapter 13.

The first paragraph begins this way:

They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also further sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed

Union with the Death and Resurrection of Christ

Notice the prerequisites of sanctification: A person has to be effectually called and regenerated before they can be sanctified. They are to be made spiritually alive

and they are to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Someone who is not a believer cannot be sanctified.

Did you notice by what virtue believers are sanctified? What makes it possible for people to be sanctified?

It is by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection.

So somehow, some way, the actual death and actual resurrection of Jesus Christ makes it possible for you to stop being under the clutch of sin right here right now.

- It makes it possible to stop being at the beck and call of sin.
- To stop obeying sin every time it commands you to indulge.
- To stop being under the control of sin

By virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the dominion of sin is destroyed in your life!

This is part of God's work of Redemption in you life!

Because you are united to Christ, you share in his death and resurrection, and therefore Sin is no longer your slave master!

Romans 6

This dethronement of Sin in the lives of believers can be clearly seen in Romans 6:5-7. In fact, all of Romans 6 talks of the power of sin being destroyed by virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Listen to verses 5-7:

*⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that **our old self^{al} was crucified with him** in order that the body*

*of sin might be brought to nothing, so that **we would no longer be enslaved to sin.** ⁷ For one who has died has been set free^[b] from sin.*

This is so important as we think about fighting sin in our lives. We fight from a position of strength. Sin has no power over you. Nothing and no one can cause you to indulge in sinful activity. The only power sin has is the power you give it. You do not owe sin anything, nor are you bound by it in any way.

Because we are united to Jesus Christ, we have been set free from sin.

Distinction with Justification

So Justification freed us from the penalty of sin. We had a debt before a holy God, and through Justification that debt is cleared.

Through this aspect of Sanctification we are freed from the power of sin. Sin was our slave master, or our superior officer, but that power has been removed. It has no more power over you.

So we are freed from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, but the presence of sin remains, and that is the reality we live in.

Progressive Change

Paragraph 1 of the confession continues the definition of Sanctification in this way:

and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all

true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

This section of the paragraph really highlights two further aspects of sanctification.

1. First indwelling sin, or “lusts” are weakened and put to death.
2. And secondly the practice of all true holiness is strengthened.

The old ways are put off and the new ways are put on.

Ephesians 4:22-24 highlights this dynamic of sanctification for us.

22 to put off your old self,^[1] *which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,* ***23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,*** ***24 and to put on the new self,*** *created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Put-off /Put On. That is the general dynamic God has ordained for us to change. We put off and we put on. Here we see our part to play in sanctification. That is how the presence of indwelling sin slowly but surely is purged away. (The penalty and the power of sin are already dealt with, a believer only deals with the presence of sin)

Just to put off is not enough. It is not enough to stop stealing, as Paul goes on in Ephesians 4 to explain.

A thief who stops stealing has not changed; he is just out of work, or on holiday. But a woman who used to steal, but stops stealing and now works hard and now gives to those in need, now that is real change. That is

sanctification. Put off stealing and put on generosity. That is how the presence of sin is dealt with.

Link

So if we are diligent in this putting off and putting on, we will eventually fully clean out the presence of sin in our lives? Right?

No! Incorrect. In God's providence, He has chosen that our sanctification will continue until the day we die, or until Christ returns.

And this brings us to our second Part: The Duration of Sanctification.

Part 2 – The Duration of Sanctification

Pr 2 of the Confession

Would it not be amazing if there was no more battle with sin? No more internal conflict and turmoil?

And we are promised that one day, in heaven, but not while we are here on earth.

Listen to how the confession puts it:

*This sanctification is throughout the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there lives on still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence arises a **continual and irreconcilable war**; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.*

Part of the reason for this lasting duration is mentioned in that first sentence: "This sanctification is throughout the whole man".

Just like sin affects the whole man, our sanctification affects the whole man. It is not just our actions that need to change, but our thoughts, our motives, and our very desires.

1 Thess 5:23-24 gives us that picture. After giving the Thessalonians a host of commands: Be patient, seek good, rejoice always, Pray always, give thanks always and so on he says:

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Just as an aside, did you notice the Thessalonians are commanded to obey the commands, but God is the one who sanctifies them. We work and God works, just like gardening.

But this verse also tells us that sanctification involves the entire person: Body and Soul/Spirit. Our entire person must be changed.

And the reality is that our actions, thoughts and motives take more than a lifetime to be free of sin. To be changed into the likeness of Christ.

We will sin less, but we will not be sinless.

Ongoing War

It is noteworthy that the confession uses the language of an ongoing War. Did you notice the language?

“a continual and irreconcilable war”. There is no peace agreement and it will rage on.

Peter puts it that way in his first letter (1 Peter 2:11)

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

And in Galatians 5:16-17, Paul talks of this ongoing conflict between the Flesh and the Spirit. How they are actively and constantly against one another.

¹⁶ 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.

There is a war at play within your soul.

Illustration of War – Not fun

So be alert, be vigilant, be prepared, fight hard. A war is filled with difficulties, dangers, deceit and death.

Yes, soldiers go overseas to war, but it is no holiday.

Not only is it no holiday, it is a long war. The victory is not won until the General declares it is, and there are many lands to reclaim.

Yes we have captured the capital, the headquarters of the country is secure, but there are many rebellions in the provinces, many places where sin still hides, still raids, still loots, and still destroys.

The war against sin is continuous and irreconcilable.

Illustration - Making friends with the enemy

If you think you have no more battles to fight, that does not mean the enemy is destroyed.

Maybe the enemy is hiding well and there is momentary respite.

Or maybe you have started trading with the enemy and are seeking a peace treaty with sin. Maybe you think sin can benefit you in some way, so you are reluctant to destroy it. Sin is deceitful, no good can come of it, and it must be destroyed wherever it is found.

We cannot and must not make friends with the enemy, nor let the enemy run free.

Proverbs 7, seriousness of sin

We cannot be seduced by the enemy.

Listen to Proverbs 7:21-27. Now I know this is talking about being seduced into sexual sin, but there are many things sin seduces us into. Seduced to our peril:

*²¹ With much seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.*

*²² All at once he follows her,
as an ox goes to the slaughter,
or as a stag is caught fast^[e]*

*²³ till an arrow pierces its liver;
as a bird rushes into a snare;
he does not know that it will cost him his life.*

*²⁴ And now, O sons, listen to me,
and be attentive to the words of my mouth.*

*²⁵ Let not your heart turn aside to her ways;
do not stray into her paths,*

²⁶ for many a victim has she laid low,

*and all her slain are a mighty throng.
27 Her house is the way to Sheol,
going down to the chambers of death*

What are you seduced by? What do you follow to your peril?

To be seduced by the enemy, to let down our guard, to think the war is over will lead to our peril!

Link

The confession continues with this illustration of War in the third paragraph. It acknowledges that there will be set-backs, there will be ground lost and battles lost, but the long term outcome will be one of progress, and the ultimate end is victory.

This brings us to our third and final section: The Direction of Sanctification.

Part 3 – The Direction of Sanctification

Upward

If we were plotting holiness throughout time it would look like a wiggly line with a definitive upward trend.

A wiggly line because in the day-to-day battle with sin we sometimes win, we sometimes fail and so holiness seems to decrease and the presence of sin sometimes seems to grow.

But the general trend over years, as you look back on your life, is that the presence of sin decreases and holiness increases.

From the confession

Listen to how the Confession talks of the Direction 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, pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in His Word hath prescribed them.

Set-backs are real. The confession even says that the remaining corruption may “much prevail”.

War is a brutal, messy, and unforgiving business. You let down your guard and you will pay the consequences.

Paul talks of this internal conflict in his own soul in Romans 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. ¹⁹ **For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

And in verse 24 we sense his heartbrokenness at his own setbacks.

²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

And in the same breath of apparent despair, he answers his own question:

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Regenerate Prevails

Yes, there will be setbacks and defeats, but the regenerate part, the new man, will prevail all thanks to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Because of the Work of Jesus Christ and because of our Union with him, we will prevail over sin. We work, but he brings the increase.

Because we have Jesus as our General, as our Captain, as our King victory is sure.

Remember the capital is already taken. Victory is sure. Sin does not have the final say. Sin does not have dominion over you. This is an objective fact. As Rom 6:14 says:

¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Conclusion

To see Christ

Now we could spend a bit of time talking about the means of Sanctification that God uses to achieve this victory. Means like prayer, preaching, fellowship, suffering, and others, and we would benefit from thinking further on these things

But I want to finish our time together by pointing out that all means of sanctification serve the same fundamental purpose.

Turn with me if you would to 2 Cor 3:18.

You see every single means of sanctification helps us to behold Christ. The more we see Christ, the more we will be like him and the more we will sin less.

And when I say “see”, I mean understand, comprehend, apprehend, delight in, rejoice in and find satisfaction in Christ

As we behold the glory of the Lord we are transformed, we are sanctified.

Look at verse 18

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,^[a] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.^[b] For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

As we take every opportunity to behold the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, that beholding transforms us into his glorious image. From one degree of glory to another.

When we find delight and satisfaction in Christ, the appeal of sin will disappear, and with it the presence of sin.

As we find delight in Christ, we are sanctified.

So look to Him, in your fight with sin, Look to Him, don't look to your self, your failures or achievements, Look to Him. His glorious work and his glorious being.

We look to Christ.

Let us pray