

Of Sanctification (Part 2)

1 Thess 5:12-28; WCF 13.2-13.3

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 24 November 2019, 16:30
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This sermon is the second part of a two-part series on our sanctification!

In part one (about five weeks ago), we were reminded of the instruments God uses to make our living holier and holier! These instruments are the *Holy Spirit* and God's *Word*!

We were also reminded of two blessings that come with our sanctification (holy living).

These are 1) that sin's rule over us diminishes, and 2) that we are quickened to a new life.

Well, this afternoon we will be reminded of three things...

- That we are being *Sanctified Through & Through*
- That there's a *Necessary War*
- That we are *Growing in Grace*

Sanctification Through & Through

My brother & sister, our New Testament passage tells us that holy living (sanctification) penetrates our whole being.

Yes, in 1 Thess 5:23 we hear the Apostle Paul praying.

And he prays the following benediction over the church in Thessalonica, "***Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely...!***"² The NIV84 uses the words, "***through and through.***"

In other words, "***May God make you completely holy³ (set apart)⁴ in every way!***"⁵

What does Paul mean by this complete (through & through) holiness?

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my two main sources whose guidance I appreciate: 1) Van Dixhoorn, Chad. 2014. *Confessing the Faith: a reader's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust. 484p.

2) Sproul, R.C. 2006. *The truth we confess*. (In: Sproul, R.C. ed. *Truths we confess: a layman's guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith – in three volumes*. Vol. 2: *Salvation and the Christian Life* (Chapters 9-22 of the Confession) Phillipsburg, NJ : P&R Publishing. 279p.).

Many words & phrases I have written, I have gladly borrowed with great thankfulness from this source.

² NASB

³ ἁγιάσαι is the Aorist Active Optative 2n Person Singular of the verb ἁγιάζω, to cause someone to have the quality of holiness—'to make holy' (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 744). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁴ **Set aside something or make it suitable for ritual purposes, consecrate, dedicate** of things (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 9). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

⁵ ὀλοτελεῖς is an Adjective Masculine Plural Accusative of ὀλοτελής, to being totally complete, with implication of meeting a high standard, *in every way complete, quite perfect* (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 704). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Well, Paul actually explains this in the very same verse when he says, “*and* (that is)⁶ *may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”⁷

So, what do we see?

Well, we see that holiness/sanctification enters every part of us, i.e. our soul/spirit and our body!

Why should sanctification infiltrate every part of us?

Well, because every part of us is marred by sin – marred by missing the mark of how God first created man’s soul/spirit and body!

Now when you & I hear that our soul/spirit and body must be sanctified, we’re inclined to be happy with the soul/spirit part of being holy! But look, unlike to ancient Greek philosophy, God’s word also includes our *bodies* in the sanctification process!

So, what does this mean in practical terms?

Well, it means that not just my *soul*, but every part of my *body* must become set apart for God’s holy use, i.e. my 1) intellect, my 2) physical actions, 3) my speech!

So, that covers everything that I *think*, everything I *do*, and everything I *say* – in other words, the way Adam & Eve were before the Fall!

Now, of course, the reason for striving to live holy is not that you/I want to *earn* our salvation, but because you & I, now that we have tasted/experienced God’s grace, are moved in our hearts to please Him in ways that He has revealed as are pleasing to Him, i.e. by keeping His commandments!

Now, here’s something quite significant, i.e. that we *pray* for our sanctification – yes, that we *ask* God to give us the heart and the strength to more & more live holy lives!

Why do I say that?

Well, because we did not pray for our *regeneration*! Yes, you & I did not pray that we should *be born again*. Neither did you & I pray that God should *adopt* us as His children! No, these were His sovereign actions! You see, by the time you & I have “found” God, we realise that, in fact, it was *He* who had found *us*! It was *He* who worked new birth in us! It was *He* who regenerated our hearts and adopted us as His children!

But with sanctification it is different!

You see, now that you & I have been born again, now we desire to live more & more holy in every part of our being! And we *pray* about that! Yes, we pray that God will use His Word and Spirit to sanctify us more and more!

Have you done that?

Again, why do we want to be sanctified?

Well, 1) to, with holy living, praise God who has generously poured out His rich blessings over us in/through Jesus Christ, His Son!

And 2), we want to be ready to meet our Groom, Jesus Christ! We want to be adorned in holiness and holy living for Him, when He comes to pick up His bride – us!

When are our chances for getting ready over?

Well, either when we die, or when our Groom Jesus returns!

⁶ “And” (in Greek, *kai* = **καί**), often means not simply “and,” but “that is” or “namely.” In other words, *kai* often has explicative meaning (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). [A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature](#) (3rd ed., p. 495). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Th 5:23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. (Emphasis mine).

Look, is that not why Paul says in another letter (i.e. the one to the Ephesians), “*Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, ...²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle ..., that she might be holy and without blemish*” when He comes (Eph 5:25-27).⁸

Surely, in the power of the Holy Spirit working alongside the Word of God, the Christian is the one who prayerfully strives to adorn him/herself with holy deeds, words and thoughts! This is also why Paul, in our NT passage (1 Thess 5:23), prays, “*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.*”⁹

Sanctification is the working-together (synergy) of God and us – never us alone, but God in us and we in (and only by) the strength He provides.

Look, is that not, again, why Paul says (in Phil 2:12-13), “*Therefore, my beloved..., work out your own salvation (sanctification) *with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*”¹⁰*

Work out..., for it is God who works...!

Why all the work by God & us?

Well, because, in this life, there’s a war going on – which brings us to point 2...

A Necessary War

Beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ, here’s the painful reality: corruption still exists in the born-again person – which means also in you & me!

Now, I have always been fascinated by what doctors can see through MRI scans, ultrasound, and X-rays!

You have a cracked bone in your leg! You might feel the pain, but, look as you may, you cannot see *through* the flesh of your leg to see that fracture! But the doctor, with his X-rays, can!

Well, the Apostle John, who was trained by the Great All-seeing Physician Himself,¹¹ said (in 1 Jn 1:10) that if we deny the presence of sin in our lives, then we make God a liar – just as you would insinuate that the orthopaedic surgeon is a liar when he has clearly spotted that fracture in your bone!

Surely, if we are half as honest as we ought to be, then we will admit and acknowledge that sin still exists in us! Indeed, we may have the *desire* to do what is right, but not the *ability* to carry it out!

Paul’s famous words of Rm 7:15 are a stark reminder: “...*what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*”¹²

So, even a saint of the caliber of Paul acknowledged that he did not obtain the heights that he wanted to reach!¹³

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 5:25–27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Th 5:23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 2:12–13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹¹ My adaptation of the well-said words of Van Dixhoorn (ibid:182).

¹² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Ro 7:15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹³ Cf. Phil 3:12-14, “*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*”

Well, if this is true of Paul, then it must surely be true of lesser men, too!

So, what do we see?

Well, we see that there's a continual war going on!

And just as I was once conscripted for military training by the South African Defence Force (and some of my fellow troops for war), so is the Christian conscripted for a continual and irreconcilable war in this life – a spiritual war.

Why?

Well, as Paul says (in Gal 5:17), "...*the* (our) *sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the* (our) *sinful nature.*"

Someone might ask, "But, preacher, give us some examples of our battles/war against sin!" Here it is...

You see, our sinning is mostly in one of two ways: either we sin in a *legalistic* way, or we sin in an *antinomian* way (antinomian means: *anti*, i.e. *against*, and *nomos*, which means *law*).

So, either we sin, like the Pharisees, in a legalistic way or we sin against the law.

Firstly legalism: What is legalism?

Well there are many forms of legalism, but let us first see what it is not: it is not when someone strives to obey God's commandments out of thankfulness for God's enormous love-deeds to him/her!

But legalism is when someone lives by the letter of God's good law – however not as a means to *thank* God, but as a means to try and *earn* his/her own salvation.

Or the legalist could also be the one who lives by his *own* laws – laws not given by God, e.g. if the elders of our church would come to the conclusion that *wearing make-up* is unbiblical (which, of course, the Bible says nothing about), and then the elders make it compulsory that no-one in this church should wear make-up (lipstick or eyeshadow or mascara, etc.), then we could well & truly say the elders are legalists, because then they will have bound the congregation members' consciences with a law the elders themselves had made! The same with if the elders would say that *drinking wine* is a sin (which, of course it is not, otherwise even our Lord would have been a sinner – which is not the case). Yet, not just if the elders were to say that wine is a sin, but when they then went so far as to forbid *everyone else* in the congregation to drink wine! Besides, it would be a kind of legalism that would be majoring on the minor!

I mean, what's easier for the Christian – not to put on lipstick, or not to gossip? To be a perfect teetotaler, or to enjoy adulterous thoughts?

See? The legalist is someone who lives by the *letter* of the law while having forgotten the *spirit* of the law.

What about the antinomian?

Well, the antinomian person is the one who does the opposite to what the legalist does. You see, the antinomian remembers the *spirit* of the law but sins against the *letter* of the law. And the antinomian does this either due to his wrong interpretation of the moral law,¹⁴ or due to his whim when it conveniently suits him!

Here's an example: You see, the person who says, "God is love; therefore, we've got to do the loving thing to acting homosexuals by allowing them to live the way they want!" Well, what this person does is he/she conveniently forgets that God is not just love, but He's also

¹⁴ Like e.g. the dispensationalist who says that some of God's Old-Testament moral laws don't apply to us anymore.

justice. And what God's moral law defines as a sin,¹⁵ is still sin! The same regarding those who say, "Christ will forgive me for the abortion I'm about to request, for Christ is love!" But such people forget that Christ also said, "***If you love Me, you will obey my commandments***" (Jn 14:15). Indeed, such people may seem to live by the *spirit* of the Law, but they conveniently choose to neglect the reality of the *letter* of the Law.¹⁶

Yes, they are the ones who will, without understanding it, quote the words of the Apostle Paul (in Rm 6:14), "...***you are not under law but under grace.***"¹⁷

But what they don't understand is that, the context within Paul said these words is: You are not under the *curse* of the law, but under grace; or You are not under the *damning power* of the law, but under grace.

You see, my brother & sister, those who have not received Jesus Christ, every time they transgress the Law of God, they are heaping up for themselves curses. And so, *they* are under the *curse* of the law – a law which holds them accountable for every single one of its transgressions. But as soon as you are in Christ, you are *freed* from the *curse* of the Law. So, in that sense, you are not under the Law, but grace.

Yet, the Christian is the one who will still put every effort in to live according to God's law! Why? Well, to, with his/her life, praise & thank God for His gracious love in Christ to us; and to adorn ourselves with holy living so that we will be a beautiful bride for our Groom on the day we meet Him!

So, the Christian who is honest knows: there's a war going on!

And we would be fools not to fight!

After all, whether you & I resist temptation or not, our very own sinful nature will wage war against our very own souls – why Peter says (in 1 Pt 2:11), "***Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.***"¹⁸

I love this saying: "Every Christian should try to live at peace with other *sinners*, but no Christian should try to live in harmony with (even) a *little sin!*"¹⁹

Well, in all this warring, there's thankfully also good news, which brings us to the last point of this sermon...

Growing in Grace

My brother & sister, the good news is that Christians are regenerate people – people who have been born from above (or born again)!²⁰

Yes, God gave the Holy Spirit to us!

So, we gradually overcome our enemy!

How?

Well, "Through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ!"²¹

¹⁵ That is: missing the mark of how man was before the Fall.

¹⁶ For more about legalism versus antinomianism cf. Sproul (ibid:92-109).

¹⁷ For the wider context, cf. Rm 6:13-14, "***Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*** ¹⁴ *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*"

¹⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Pt 2:11). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁹ Van Dixhoorn (ibid:183)

²⁰ See Jesus' words to Nicodemus in Jn 3:7, "***You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'***"

²¹ Cf. WCF 13.3 which is based upon:

Rm 6:14 ***For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.***

So, what's the effect of that?

Well, that you & I grow in our fitness to combat sin. Yes, just as a marathon athlete exercises himself to combat the pain in his legs & joints, and to get his heart & lungs fit, so does the Christian who is constantly running to Jesus and running away from sin!

And how does one run to Jesus?

By soaking yourself in the Word of God! This way you will, as Peter says (in 2 Pt 3:18), "**...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!**"

You see, it's the same old story of the person who spends much time in his flower garden! After a while, he starts smelling like flowers – why Paul told the Corinthians (in 2 Cor 3:18), "**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.**"²²

The more you & I look at Christ – the more we spend time studying Him and His Word, and praying to Him – the more we will become like Him!

This is why John is able to assure us (in 1 Jn 5:4) that "**...everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.**"

My brother & sister, Christians are sinners who are also saints. And what does the Bible tell us about saints? Well, that saints are the ones who, with awe and trembling,²³ make every effort²⁴ to grow in grace!

May that also be your & my hearts' desire!

AMEN (2503 words excluding footnotes)

1 Jn 5:4, "**...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.**"

Eph 4:15-16, "**Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**"

²² 2 Cor 3:18-19, "**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.**

²³ Cf. Phil 2:12, "**Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...**

²⁴ Cf. 2 Pt 1:5-9 "**For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.**