

“Of Sanctification” part 8, WCF 13.3.3–4, Progress Perfection

2021.02.28 Sabbath School Lesson

Hopewell ARPC, Culleoka, TN

WCF 13.3

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

(k) Rom. 7:23.

(l) Rom. 6:14; I John 5:4; Eph. 4:15, 16.

(m) II Pet. 3:18; II Cor. 3:18.

(n) II Cor. 7:1.

The saints grow in grace

²Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; ¹⁵ and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

²Corinthians 3:7 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? ⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. ¹⁰ For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹ For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

¹² Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—¹³ unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Perfecting holiness in the fear of God

²Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

*"I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people."*

¹⁷ Therefore

*"Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you."*

¹⁸ *"I will be a Father to you,
and you shall be My sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty."*

^{7:1}Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are welcome to listen to the audio recording, which you may find via tinysa.com/hopewellarp)

So last week. Last week we covered the portion. Kind of footnoted by letter L there and we looked at the passages and we actually added at the beginning portion of Romans 8 so that we would so that we could think about that first part yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying spirit of Christ.

And then and then we went on to consider the regenerate part death overcome and how wonderful it is to labor along with God the Holy Spirit independence upon and union with God the son are redeemer the Lord Jesus Christ in a work of sanctification that will absolutely succeed and how encouraging it is to know that you're participating in something that will be successful.

Used illustration that I had not used before for that yeah like a Democrat working on an election. Where you know, the things are all kind of stacked in your favorite it doesn't really matter how big seem to be going you can you can be glad and confident the whole time because you know how it ends.

But but my go-to illustration is actually more in keeping with the scripture and it's like a little child who works on projects with his daddy and that child doesn't yet know that well maybe he does to some extent but in his experience daddy is almost infallible and he knows that every time he does something with daddy it gets done it works and he part of going through the process even though you're not doing your part well all the time but you're doing it with someone.

Who is guaranteeing the outcome and supplying the wisdom and the strength and often even you know, putting his hand over yours and turning the thing and there's a there's a wonderful illustration of that in Psalm 73 when ASAP is switched over to talking about his own end he's gone to gone to worship he's remembered the end of the wicked.

And how all at once they're going to fall and he says nevertheless I am continually with you you take me by the hand you guide me by your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory and the Hebrew and you take me by the hand is a hand in hand kind of word picture and it's just marvelous so that's what that's what the victory of sanctification is like and that brings us this morning to hopefully both letter m.

And letter in and so the saints grow in grace and that's kind of the the manner maybe of sanctification will we'll talk about how it progresses there, so that's progress and then perfecting holiness and the fear of God and that's perfection and so we've set the footnoted proof texts in their context.

It's on the page there, if you if you don't have a page from the table and that's what we hope to do this morning so let's pray our Father in heaven how we thank you for granting to us your fatherly care and your word to know about it and to know how much it aims at bringing us all the way home and fitting us for that home and, Gladdening us in the anticipation of that home and you oh God our our dwelling place from all generations you are all we desire in heaven and on earth our strength and our heart fail but you are the strength of our heart and our portion forever for us it is good to be near you so help us now as we come to study from your word a little bit about growing by the grace of Christ.

And growing by knowing Christ and the, Perfection at which we are to be aiming as we do so so help us in this time we ask in Jesus name amen. All right, so. The saints grow in grace. Not sure. When this would have been become a controversial statement it's something that we believed in churches that I was in growing up and certainly there wasn't that much question about it during the time that I was in seminary but early in my ministry.

I've been a pastor for about 20 years now early in my ministry children, they you need to know that there are people in reform churches who started talking about growing and holiness as if it's something that doesn't really. Happen that Christians are forgiven and we love God and we love our neighbor but the failure is so continual and it never gets better on this side of glory, we just kind of cling to Jesus by the skin of our faith and we get together sometimes and commiserate which means everybody pats each other on the back about how badly we're all doing in our sanctification and that it's just gonna be that way and then one day we'll die in southern.

We'll be perfect and it'll be okay again and that God is okay with our sin and we should be okay with our sin but God hates our sin and he hates it so much he's getting rid of it and we should be getting rid of it because that's what he is doing and one of the things that he tells us is that growth is real and that it's something that we should be working at and rejoicing over and.

And so this this phrase the Saints growing grace. I'm glad that it was specifically put in here. I'm I'm not familiar enough with the history of their time either but often the same kinds of mistakes about what the Bible says and what it's like to trust in the Lord and walk with the Lord are made at different times throughout church history, lots of the problems we have in the reformed churches today are things that you'll have.

Paul. All say like as some accused us of saying and so you say oh well that false accusation against reform theology is at least two thousand years old and and so that's very encouraging so the Saints growing race second. Peter one of the things that second Peter as a whole is dealing with our teachers in the church who are denying the Lord who bought them denying our master by saying that.

How you live in this life doesn't really doesn't really matter so he also was battling against those you said you didn't need to be pursuing holiness and the passage that we have in front of us for the saints growing grace is actually the conclusion to the letter just the last five verses of second.

Peter chapter 3 and the one they footnoted is actually the very last verse. So why don't we have folks pick up second second Peter chapter 3 and beginning in verse 14 just read one at a time and whoever is bold enough to just start reading will get to read so go ahead someone verse 14.

And which or something is hard to be understood which they that are unworthy and unstable rest as they do also the other.

Stroke and gravity describes. Your name but now I forever I mean, thank you very good. So is concluding the letter he makes reference to what we were talking about that Paul also had those who said well if salvation is all by grace and let's just go on sinning so that grace may increase and we've actually dealt with Romans chapter six last week, so this is kind of building on that and you know, Peter was aware that there were twisting Paul and there were twisting the other scriptures.

But he's calling something to our attention and that is that even if our theology is straight we also can fall into the same trap. A feeling like we're not making any progress. I'm sure not just many of you children may be encouraging or comforting to you to know that this is the experience of us adults as well, we have to come to the Lord and ask for forgiveness for the same sins.

Hoover and over again and we we come and ask for the same strength and often it can be discouraging especially if we are in a season of weakness or backsliding. And those those things happen it is an irreconcilable war and we a few weeks ago now did out of Romans 7 consider how sometimes the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail one of the encouraging things.

About parenting few children is that as we come to the Lord and ask for the same supply of help over and over again we've got one of my children won't be difficult for you to figure out whom because as they grow they need less and less discipline but I've got one of my children who almost gets happy when it's time to be disciplined.

Because this child says, are we gonna pray afterward we're gonna pray afterward and yeah, we're gonna pray afterward and then that child says the child says oh but it's gonna hurt. Yeah, it's gonna hurt and I'm sorry he's gonna hurt and you get down on your knees and after it hurts and you thank God that you and your child are kneeling in your living room instead of burning in hell and that it's because he gave his son to receive what we actually deserve and you thank him that he is the one who has given us the righteousness of his son counted for him.

And that he is counted for us through faith and that he has given us means by which he also works out the righteousness of his son in our lives and you pray for that faith for your child and you pray to see the fruit of faith in your child and and working out and.

The things that specifically the sins that you're praying about and for change over time and the frequency changes over time. And as you know, some of you hadn't had eight to go through but. It is so encouraging. To see the the. What to me because the growth feels a lot slower for me the rapid sanctification of covenant children that over the course of just one decade you've seen this massive what feels to me, you know as a daddy massive amount of growth and in these children and yet.

Think if we saw how big sin is. The increment of our own progress and sanctification are equally big right you got the chem kids. I'm gonna I know this is gonna be narrowly useful application for some but you got your significant figures and your exponents, right? The exponent of the quantity of our sinfulness is huge so you know, you're you're only observing this small amount of change over here and you feel like you're you're gone from you know sanctification 0.024 to 0.025 in in a couple of years but it's multiplied by this great big massive thing that the that sin and holiness are.

So there is real growth and it's going to it's going to perfection and we should be encouraged by the reality of growth and we should and we should not deny it. We want to make sure that we're we're recognizing that it is the sanctifying spirit of Christ that it is him who works in us both the will and to work for his own good pleasure so that there's so that we will avoid pride in it, but it does not a Christian virtue.

To ignore or be blind to the fact that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ that robs our God of the glory of something he is doing and it robs the believer of the joy over something that he is doing and so growth is real and when one of the things that discouragement can do is it can be paralyzing or debilitating you could say well and it feels like I'm never really growing.

I guess it's, The there's no point in trying very hard. I know I'm not the only one who has slid into backslidden into that kind of attitude about my sanctification in this room, so therefore beloved looking forward to these things be diligent, so as we look forward to these things there's a command what's the command?

Be diligent okay, so what does be diligent mean?

Okay watchful keeping on.

Determination.

Okay, so.

Work hard put in effort be diligent, okay, so. Does that mean don't be dependent. Are those two things in conflict. No you're dependent on Christ but dependence on Christ isn't the opposite of diligence. You know work hard and let God. Right yeah there's there's something to not you know, letting go of the idea that it depends upon you in that sense let go and let God but that doesn't mean stop working hard.

Okay, so be diligent and then.

We have something different did someone say steadfast. Okay. I thought we had the word steadfast but I can't find oh lest you fall verse 17 right therefore beloved since you know, this beforehand okay, what do you know beforehand that you're going to be found by him how? Verse 14.

Yeah, you're gonna be blameless. Without spot and blameless in peace, okay, so you're not in peace right now, you're at war with your sin, you're not without spot right now you're without spot in the judgment of God, but not in your behavior not blameless right now. Your blameless in union with Christ his righteousness is counted for you but there's much to be blamed in our conduct but you will be found by him in those things and the fact that you will be commands diligence and lest you fall from your own steadfastness verse 17 since you know, this beforehand that we can twist the scriptures in the way that.

That Peters the ones Peters writing against have been doing for this whole letter have been doing since you know, that that's possible for you to slide into beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness being led away with the error of the wicked but. Grow. So what's the command in verse 18.

Grow what does growing look like kids how many of you kids have somewhere in the house where there are lines? And dates and probably initials and my house we growing up we had names but we have too many names and not enough room for the lines and it's a mess.

You have somewhere in your house where there's like do you yeah and your parents thought they were gonna paint over it one day when you got old and went away but after you're gone, they're gonna find it very hard to to paint over those precious lines. Okay, so what is growing look like?

It's not always perceptible is it? But it's always happening. Yeah, some of you may be planting things already maybe even outside now I guess I don't know but maybe planting things already inside and if you're like me when when you were younger and you planted something you would come running to it multiple times a day to see if it had grown and the command here is is a command to grow and what are the two things by which this growing happens?

In verse 18. But grow by the grace who's grace. Of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so it's unto his glory it's unto it it's under his command and it's upon his ability grow by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, it's we don't we don't deserve it so he gets the credit we can't do it so his strength is is what's glorified grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ what's, The second part of it.

Grow and I know the English says in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, but in can mean a lot of things and even the even the Greek can mean a lot of things but I think this is also instrumental is the relationship here between grow and knowledge it's it's true that we are to know the Lord Jesus more and more but I don't think grammatically that's what's going on in the sentence, thank you saying grow more and more.

By knowing the Lord Jesus. That it is the knowledge of Christ and the union that you have with Jesus being worked out in you that produces the growth so grow by maybe there is a better way for us to say it to to bring out this instrumental instrumentality relationship because you have the the double object here grow by the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to.

Him be the glory both now and forever so it's a growing this growing also comes out in second Corinthians three so direct your attention to the next portion down there and there was a glory that was passing away and this was he's using in a an illustration how intense the appearance of Moses's face was and what did the Israelites think when Moses.

Came out and he looked like. Something from a sci-fi film and and he was shining and glorious and how did they respond those were familiar with the passage or looking at second? Corinthians three. All right, somebody just read verse seven. Which. Passing away. So how did the children respond to Moses shining face?

They couldn't look at him, in fact if you go back to the original context, they were afraid to look at him, they didn't want to come near him they thought you know, they're gonna get radiation poisoning or something, you know, they didn't have the category of radiation poisoning probably but there are afraid to come near him because of how great the glory was that had.

Shen on his face and so he had yeah he put on his face mask so that they wouldn't get radiation wouldn't be in radiation glory danger. Now. What was the ministry of that was written on the stem tablets called in second Corinthians 3:7 the ministry of death, okay, the the law came through Moses it, you know, there are in you know in the Old Testament, of course, there's always the the promise of Christ but here it's talking about the law of commandments that.

That could only condemn us apart from the Lord Jesus. Now, what's the difference between the glory of the ministry of death and what's the other ministry describe the verse 8 describes someone read verse 8. Okay, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be? More glorious. Okay, so which is more glorious the glory of what produced Moses's scary face or the glory of what the Holy Spirit is doing in Christians now.

Which one is more glorious? Okay, which one is the latter?

The ministry of the spirit. So listen kids. The Apostle Paul is saying Moses it was so what Moses was doing was so glorious that when it shown on his face it scared the Israelites. And then he turns to you and he says when you trust in Jesus and you belong to Jesus and you're already counted righteous in Jesus what he is doing in you who have been counted righteous as he makes you more and more righteous.

Is more glorious than what made Moses a scary face. Now, it doesn't show up on your face. I don't see you. Lord say morning you walk in and you're shining like 10,000 lumens and and I'm like, oh no, isn't he your face is so bright this week? You know put your mask on so I'm not blinded.

So it it doesn't have the same visible manifestation but the reality is that what God is doing in the Christian is even more glorious than what had that visible manifestation in Moses. So this is again to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ like your looking at second Peter chapter 3 and it is a growth that is happening.

So we need to hurry on so that we can get all the way to verse 18. Why don't we just go ahead and read the rest of the passage? Someone start verse 9 and one verse at a time until we get to the end.

One. We have such a hope we are very cold.

Unlike Moses who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

Was taken away.

Map of Lord is the spirit and we're to spirit of the Lord is there is.

Nobody all with open face to holding as a blast that will work are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit. Okay so hold again consider the parallels in the in the two passages as you behold the Lord by the grace of Christ and by the knowing of Christ okay, so but we all with unwill unveiled face beholding as in a mirror as in a glass so like that in the mirror the glory of the Lord so we're beholding him and he is transforming us into what image verse 18.

His own image the same image, right? So you look in the mirror and what you see in the mirror of scripture while you see two things, right? James chapter one tells you you see yourself and that you you should know what changes to make but here there's somebody else that you see in the mirror of scripture, whom do you see in the mirror of scripture?

You see Jesus and when you see Jesus you also see a picture of your future self. Okay, so the the difference is that this mirror actually has has been appointed as the instrument by which he is working that transformation. Okay, so but we all with unveiled Facebook holding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into this same image from glory to glory just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

So you have the glory of who Jesus is you have the glory that that has been counted for you and you have the glory that. You will be like that when he's done with the work that he that he is doing in you and it's a greater glory than what what Moses face was covered to hide so that the Israelites would not be afraid.

And then it goes on one of my favorite portions of scripture second Corinthians 4 and how the Lord does that work just by the plane speaking of his word. You don't got to dress up the ministry because what the ordinary minister. The. Ministry is doing is is accomplishing a glory that no man-made anything could ever hope to attain to.

So that's progress and I think we'll hold up one more week to talk about perfection.

Or maybe not maybe not.

In fact, let's use first John chapter 3. Turn the first John chapter 3 and we'll handle perfection from that passage.

I think we have to do less expositional work in 1st John chapter 3 and we'll be able to finish up now. I'll just go ahead and read it. Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God. Now one of the things that we sometimes not that often maybe.

We should do it more have done in our house and maybe you have done in your house to get pictures of mom and dad out from when they have your age and you look at it and you look at you you say wow they sure look alike. Well, there's something like that going on here too.

God loved us so much that he called us this children but he doesn't just it's not just kind of a way of talking. Where where is just words. Behold what manner of love the fathers bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God therefore the world does not know us and who are you?

Well, you would know who I am because I'm starting to look like my daddy because it did not know him beloved now we are children of God, so we have the status and has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed we shall be like him.

For we shall see him as he is. Okay, so he's called us his children and he the the Lord Jesus will will return and we will see him in fact we'll see him in in glory before he returns if if we die first and we will be like him then for we shall see him as he is and everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself.

Just as he is pure. So the guarantee of perfection for the Christian we will be like him when we see him the guarantee of perfection in the for the Christian is what produces the pursuit of perfection. What does okay how many of those who have this hope purify themselves?

Verse 3 first John 3:3 everyone yes, that's right all everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, what does everyone who has this hope in him do? Purifies himself, we're all working at sanctification everybody who hopes in Christ genuinely hopes in Christ purifies himself unto what standard. Everyone who hopes has this hope and him purifies himself just as he is pure so it's Christ and the perfection of Christ that is both the guaranteed outcome and the current standard the that we will be like him because we'll see him as he is and he everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure so we will grow we'll progress sometimes imperceptibly sometimes with.

Slidings and the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail but growth is real there's real progress and the standard and the guaranteed end which we won't have in this life we talked about that in a previous paragraph, but the guaranteed end is perfection so that is the standard let's pray our father in heaven.

We thank you for your word which corrects these errors that are not only errors that they had at the time of Peter and Paul and that many in the churches have today but as you have reminded us our errors that rise up in our own hearts and so we pray that you would cause us to believe from your word that Christian growth and growth and sanctification is real and make us to rejoice in the glory of Jesus and, How both to which we are being conformed and how he is glorified by the work that you do in us by him and by your spirit making us like him we pray Lord that you would give us that hope that we would be certain about the victory that is coming so that we would participate in this process that we would purify ourselves and help us oh God not to modify our compromise your standard, but to pursue perfection knowing that you will make it succeed at last we.

'Il call these things in Jesus name amen.