
How Sanctification Works: The Westminster Assembly And Progressive Sanctification

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Question 75: What is sanctification?

Answer: Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time through the powerful operation of his Spirit, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin and rise unto newness of life. (Westminster Larger Catechism)

Introduction: The Westminster Assembly and Progressive Sanctification

The topic before the reader, is that of how sanctification works—or, in other words, the nature of progressive sanctification. The primary content to address that question will be the Westminster Assembly and their contemporaries. In other words, Westminsterian theology and its contemporary Puritan writings will be the primary documents consulted in addressing how the believer's progressive sanctification takes place. To ask this chief consideration another way, we are purposing to determine how one increases in holiness. Thus this paper seeks to address how the believer, really and personally, increases in being set apart unto the Lord in this life, as conceived of by mid-1600 majority Reformed and confessional theology.

To further define our task at hand, let us differentiate between what is being spoken to and what is not under our purview. This paper does not seek to address the immediate break from the bondage of sin—the dominion of sin itself being done away with in the believer's life. Thus, this paper is not dealing with definitive sanctification whatsoever. Additionally, this paper is not addressing the final and complete sanctification that the believer will experience when glorified, when he or she finally sees the Lord. Though both of these aspects, definitive sanctification (i.e., justification), and final sanctification (i.e. glorification), are referenced in the confessional material, they are not doctrines within the scope of the present treatise.

Instead, the sole doctrine before us at present is progressive sanctification—particularly, the practical theology of it, regarding how one becomes more holy.

Contrasting Various Constructions of Progressive Sanctification

It is common knowledge in reformational theology that regeneration is the sole work of God, worked in the elect monergistically, without cooperation from the person who is *being* regenerated. It too is apparent in a Reformed framework that the sole ground of justification is the passive and active obedience of Christ on the believer's behalf—the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer by faith. But when it comes to sanctification, and how one goes about increasing in said sanctification, it is at that point where Reformed believers become functional Arminians in their construction of theology. It is, as it were, as if the ancient Galatian heresy of “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” is very much alive and active even in the Reformed church today (Gal. 3:3, ESV).

Within the modern and evangelical articulation of progressive sanctification there is the regular talk of synergistic sanctification.¹ Additionally, there is the functional Roman Catholic notion of analytical sanctification, that though one must be granted original grace, the believer is responsible for sanctifying himself by his own efforts.²

Contrast such constructions with the language of the Westminster Divines in the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 75, which says that “Sanctification is *a work of God...*” (emphasis mine). Stated more completely, Westminster says that sanctification is “a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time *through the powerful operation of his Spirit*, applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God” (emphasis added).

The language of monergism and synergism are often reserved for systematic debates and discussions of regeneration, but if category borrowing will be permitted, the Divine's thoughtful construction of the sentence and definition in Larger Catechism Question 75 establishes a Reformed articulation of *monergistic* sanctification. God is the one who unilaterally operates, sanctifying the believer and remaking him or her to be conformed to the pattern of Christ. Therefore, the terminology of synergism ought to be set aside, and instead the emphasis ought to be placed where Westminsterian theology rightly places it: sanctification is the divine operation of God in the life of the believer.

Thus in answering the preliminary question of “who does the work of sanctification?” we are resoundingly met with the answer of the Triune God.

Who Does the Work of Sanctification? The Operations of the Triune God

Walter Marshall, a 17th Century preacher and contemporary of the Westminster Assembly, frames the present discussion well in his book, *the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. While Marshall was not himself a delegate to the Assembly, nor a contributor to the development of its theology, yet as a contemporary of the Divines, as one who interacted with assembly members, and as one who wrote his most well known work already mentioned on the topic of sanctification, his theology stands as representative of the Puritan articulation at that time.

¹ See Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Zondervan Academic, 2016) and John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, Illustrated Edition (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2013), 1266 for two contemporary illustrations of this point.

² R. C. Sproul, “The Grounds of Our Justification,” Ligonier Ministries, accessed September 7, 2020, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/grounds-our-justification/>.

In *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, Marshall reflects on his eager seeking of holiness and peace before God. He labored long on the thought of how he could become more holy, a holiness apart from which he would not see God. In such reflection, he came to realize that he had been trying to make his own righteousness the basis of his dealings with God as well as the grounds for his peace.³ It was only when he came to see that his holiness was a result of his mystical union with Christ that a gospel understanding was made clear to him and he arrived at true peace in Christ. As he stated in his own words, “the way we get holy endowments and qualifications necessary to frame and enable us for the immediate practice of the law, is to receive them out of the fullness of Christ, by fellowship with him, and that we may have this fellowship, we must be in Christ and have Christ himself in us, by a mystical union with him.”⁴

Here the proper sequencing can be seen as revealed by Marshall: the believer’s sanctification does not flow *from* one’s obedience, but instead *one’s obedience* flows from his sanctification. The believer’s progressive and increasing holiness is a result of union with Christ. Such an ordering cannot be overstated as to its crucial theological importance. If the believer is sanctified *by* his obedience, then the believer is the one who sanctifies. But if, instead, one’s obedience is a fruit of sanctification, then it is God who sanctifies, and it is because of His work that the believer obeys in an increasing way.

It is likely that Thomas Goodwin and Richard Baxter were among the first who enabled Walter Marshall to see the error of relying on his own righteousness. Marshall personally interviewed both Goodwin and Baxter about his struggles with the weightiness of his own sin, to which Baxter said that he believed Marshall was taking matters too legalistically, and to which Goodwin said, “Marshall had forgotten to mention the greatest sin of all, of not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of his sins and the sanctifying of his nature.”⁵

In this understanding and articulation of sanctification, then, union with Christ is the source of the believer’s holiness.⁶ After all, 1 Corinthians 1:30 describes Christ himself as *our sanctification* when Paul says: “Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

Yet, this work of being made more holy must not be supposed to be the work of the Son alone. Rather, as we see elsewhere in Scripture, God the Father calls the believer to be holy, as He himself is holy. He is the one who sanctifies, for He says in Leviticus 20:26, “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.” Additionally, it can be seen that the loving heavenly Father disciplines His children as revealed in the book of Hebrews chapter 12.

³ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, Reformation Heritage Books, 2013 reprint edition, vi.

⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁵ Maurice J. Roberts et al., *Aspects of Sanctification*: Westminster Conference, 1981, 18.

⁶ Were it the purview of this paper to further this point, it could be shown that justification and regeneration are the ground of the believer’s holiness, and faith is the instrument of the believer’s sanctification. For the present purposes it will suffice to assert these points. See J.V. Fesko, “A More Perfect Union? Justification and Union with Christ,” in *Justified: Modern Reformation Essay on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Michael Horton and Ryan Glomsrud ([San Diego?]: Modern Reformation, 2010).

As to the point immediately stated in the body of the paper, see Joseph C Morecraft, *Authentic Christianity: An Exposition of the Theology and Ethics of the Westminster Larger Catechism* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2009), 203.

In addition to the work of the Father and the Son, God speaks in that famous prophetic promise of the covenant in Ezekiel 36 that He will infuse holiness within us by the work of His Spirit. For He says: “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek. 36:27). So of the work of all three persons of the Trinity, it can be rightly said that God the Father sanctifies, God the Son sanctifies, and God the Holy Spirit sanctifies. Thus in asking the most basic question, “who does the work of sanctification in the believer’s life?”, the answer simply put is: God.

Look once again at Westminster Larger Catechism Question 75 and notice the Triune construction in the way the question speaks of this most gracious work, when it says: “Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom *God* hath before the foundation of the world chosen to be holy, are in time through the powerful operation of *his Spirit*, applying the death and resurrection of *Christ* unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God” (emphasis mine).⁷

A Cooperative Effort?

If what has just been concluded is true, that God is the one who sanctifies, how then does a Reformed understanding of progressive sanctification reconcile with human responsibility? After all, believers are called upon to obey the Lord. The Holy Text is full of imperatives. Christians are commanded to be holy as the Lord is holy. There is a clear directive to “work out your own salvation,” and even a clear injunctive, “Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy” (Phil 2:12, Lev 20:7). This final command could even more clearly be translated as the King James Version reads: “Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the Lord your God.” These commands seem to stand in paradoxical contradistinction to the notion that God is the one who sanctifies.

To further appreciate this tension, let us revisit Walter Marshall, when he says that “we know that holiness is a part of our salvation and they that think men may or can invent any means effectual for the attainment of it, do ascribe salvation *partly* to men and rob God of his glory.”⁸ And elsewhere, “to suggest that we are in need of something more than vital union with Christ [whether a unique experience, or works of the law] is to suggest that Christ is insufficient and what he has accomplished in the gospel is not enough” (parenthetical addition mine).⁹

Therefore, we are not to rob God of his glory, and we do not for a moment want to suggest that Christ’s finished work is insufficient in the life of the believer. Yet, at the same time we must also embrace the call to human responsibility. Wherein lies the solution to this tension?

We will see the fuller solution to this question below, but first recall the proper sequencing established above: that obedience flows *from* sanctification, and the fact that the Triune God sanctifies is evidenced by the individual believer obeying His law. Obedience to His law, therefore, is not the instrument of sanctification; instead, faith in Christ is the instrument of sanctification, and all those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ will be sanctified, and will progressively obey him more and more. If human obedience, then, is the evidence that the believer is being made more and more holy, the alleviation of the tension has already begun to be resolved.

⁷ According to the traditional Reformed understanding of election, the Father is the one who appoints believers unto life, choosing them before the foundation of the world according to his good pleasure. Thus, by implication, the Divines are communicating a Triune conceptualization of sanctification.

⁸ Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 185.

⁹ Roberts et al., *Westminster Conference Papers*, 38.

But if we demonstrate our sanctification through our obedience, and if we lay hold of sanctification by faith in Christ, what place, then, is there for helps? What role can aids play in one's growth in any way?

Let us further draw out this point from one Westminster Divine to further appreciate these two points—God's sanctification of man, and the fervent call for human responsibility. William Twisse, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, wrote in his catechetical treatment of the Lord's Prayer that the holiness of man finds its beginning in the holiness of God. Expounding upon the petition "Hallowed be Thy name" he says, "In this first petition we see the first thing our Savior would have us pray for, is the knowledge of God: For he well knew the want of this is the cause of all evil: And the knowledge of God is the beginning of all goodness."¹⁰ Twisse continues explaining that the believer is to ask to know still more that God "delights in holiness."

As he moves down the petitions of the Lord's Prayer and arrives at "Deliver us from evil," he states that the believer thereby prays, "God will keep us from sins hereafter."¹¹ Twisse is calling the believer to recognize that the knowledge of God is the origin of all holiness, and that it is entirely by the work of God that we have any ability to walk in holiness. To put this point another way: if we would attempt to keep ourselves from sin, we will utterly fail. If we would have God deliver us from sin, He will utterly succeed!

The above unfolds completely within a discussion of God's call upon the Christian to pray. God, as sovereign and redeeming Lord, is the sanctifier of men. All the while He provides the means, or helps to the end of sanctification, one of which is prayer.

So in preliminarily answering the question, "if God does the work of sanctification, what place is there for means?", the answer from the Divines is, "much in every way."

By Every Means Necessary!

To return one final time to Walter Marshall's magnum opus, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, Marshall, after unpacking at length how one is sanctified by faith by believing upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and drawing upon one's union with Christ as the basis for one's sanctification, concludes his discourse by pointing to means. Simply because we are sanctified by Christ, in our union with him through faith in the Son of God, in no way nullifies the means afforded to us in the Word of God. After all, these are helps and not hindrances to our sanctification. However, if we make them the basis of our sanctification, then, as Marshall says, they do in fact become impediments to our true holiness, for we once again fall into the trap of sanctification by works of the law and trusting in human effort to sanctify oneself.¹² Nevertheless, we must use them, lest we be like "those proud Pharisees and lawyers that thought it a thing beneath them, and refused to be baptized by John."¹³

Here we see Marshall mentioning the two primary heads of the means offered to the believer: Word and sacrament. But these, of course, are not the only two presented by Westminsterian

¹⁰ William Twisse, *A Briefe Catecheticall Exposition of Christian Doctrine Diuided into Foure Catechismes, The Second Catechisme Concerning the Lord's Prayer*, accessed August 31, 2020, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A14092.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1>, 18-9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹² Marshall, *Gospel Mystery*, 184 and Roberts et al., *Westminster Conference Papers*, 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 185.

theologians on this point. The list of possible means the Lord uses to sanctify believers includes the following:¹⁴

1. The Word of God. Diligently giving oneself to the reading, but especially the hearing of the preaching of the Word, is the first and primary means afforded to the believer in one's sanctification. To this point and to this end, John Flavel said the study of the Scriptures is "the best preservative against sin."¹⁵
2. The diligent listening to the Word. Related to the first, and perhaps a subset of the first, there is the due use not only of the preaching of the Word, but the active, effortful hearing of it.
3. Meditating upon the Word. Reflecting upon and ensuring a devotional depth of understanding of the Word, and committing the precepts of the word to memory, is an added step of laying hold of the contents of the Word in one's life.
4. The use of good books as an aid to studying the Scriptures. Though secondary sources are no replacement for the Scriptures themselves, they are a useful exposition and development of the theology of the word.
5. Examining one's state and ways according to and by the word. This help in sanctification may also be termed self-examination. Quoting John Flavel once again, "We should call our hearts to account every evening, and say, 'O my heart! Where have you been today? Where have your thoughts been wandering? O naughty heart! O vain heart! Could you not abide by the fountain of delights? Is there better pleasure with the creature, than with your redeemer God?'"¹⁶
6. Watchfulness in keeping one's ways. Not only must believers be retroactively self-examining, there is also a spiritual benefit in proactive examination.
7. Resting in Christ. This communion in our union with Christ is not only a means of breaking sin's dominion (cf. Rom. 6), but it is useful in dismantling sin's ongoing tyranny and consequences.
8. The sacrament of baptism. This holy ordinance is the formal yoking of oneself to Christ's bride, and being rightly added to the number of Christ.
9. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This ordinance emphasizes a frequency of communing with Christ to remember the benefits of His redemption: "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:25).
10. Hungering after righteousness. The believer's continual longing and prayer for the Spirit's work of further sanctification is one of the aides in sanctification.
11. The singing of Psalms with grace in the heart (Eph. 5:19 and Westminster Confession of Faith 21.5).

¹⁴ The original compilation of this list of helps was developed from and expanded out of Joseph C Morecraft, *Authentic Christianity: An Exposition of the Theology and Ethics of the Westminster Larger Catechism* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2009).

¹⁵ John Flavel, *Works of John Flavel*, 1st Edition (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968), 5:504.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5:505.

12. Fasting.
13. The taking and keeping of vows.
14. Associating with and developing close friendships with holy people. In unpacking the fellowship and communion with the saints, one theologian goes back through many of the aforementioned means and speaks of: mutual accountability under the Word, mutual hearing the Word, mutual prayer, etc., thereby enlarging one's vision for the benefit of the people of God in aiding fellow believers in our sanctification.¹⁷
15. Godly discourse.
16. The right use of church discipline.
17. The sanctifying benefit of seeing the faithless and godless fall. Notice in this sobering thought the active call to faithfulness and the work of God in using providential matters external to the believer as a means to further sanctify. To emphasize the appeal to human obedience, and the need for it, George Gillespie commenting on 2 Peter 3:18 says: "If you would not be drawn away after the error of the wicked ... so must you, labour still for a greater measure of the lively work of sanctifying grace; in which respects Augustine saith well, that the adversaries of the truth do this good to the true members of the church, that the fall of those makes these to take better hold upon God."¹⁸
18. The right use of church membership.
19. The right use of the Sabbath day. The Divines' understanding of the Sabbath day would rightly make the contemporary believer blush in our relatively paltry thoughts and use of that day. They speak of sanctifying the day, and the day thereby being useful in sanctifying the believer—as though they genuinely believed that Sabbath was made for man's benefit (and not man made for the Sabbath)! William Gouge, Westminster Assembly member, wrote an entire treatise on *The Sabbath's Sanctification*, speaking of the spiritual benefits of the Sabbath Day to the believer and the promises contained in setting the Sabbath apart as holy:

A conscionable sanctifying of the Lords day, by a due observing that which God hath prescribed, is a special means to ... quicken and increase the graces which have been formerly wrought in us. The Lords day is a special means of renewing what is decayed. As weights of a clock by oft winding up are kept continually going, so grace by the foresaid duties is kept in continual exercise.¹⁹

He goes on addressing the promises contained in Lord's Day observance when he says:

Promises, great and precious promises, being made by one that is able to perform what he promises, and with all is true and faithful, and in that kind will not fail to make good his word, are a strong motive to stir up men to do with the uttermost of their power the things whereunto such and such promises are made. But promises, great and many, by God himself, of whose power, and truth no

¹⁷ See Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You: The Power of the Gospel for Personal Change* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2010), 204, as he cites several authors and theologians who develop the corporate nature of the means of grace.

¹⁸ George Gillespie, *The Works of Mr. George Gillespie* (Edinburgh: 1844), 1:65.

¹⁹ William Gouge, *The Sabbath's Sanctification* (EEBO Editions, ProQuest, 2011), 38-9.

question can be made, are made to such as are conscionable in keeping the Sabbath.²⁰

William Gouge is providing that biblical balance of doing that which the believer has the power to do, all the while maintaining that it is God who works, wills, and promises growth in godliness.

20. Repenting of sin. Thomas Brooks helpfully indicates that this act is the work of the Spirit in the believer, for genuine repentance cannot happen in the natural man, and is impossible apart from grace.²¹ Thus, consistently and diligently seeking to conform one's life to the pattern of Christ, mortifying the flesh and walking according to the Spirit, is yet another faithful help in the lifelong pursuit of holiness.

As the next points show, the Divines also saw a personal benefit in the divinely appointed institutions of family, church, and state, so far as the external means of sanctification are concerned.

21. Sanctification through the means of the family. Seeing the family's benefits flow to the church and also the commonwealth, Edmund Calamy, Westminster Assembly member, said, "First reform your own families, and then you will be the fitter to reform the family of God. Let the master reform his servant, the father his child, the husband his wife," and so on.²² Notice how the divinely appointed authority (master, father, husband) is spoken of as having sanctifying influence on the one under godly authority (servant, child, wife). It certainly cannot be said, in this case, that the servant, child, or wife is sanctifying themselves, but Calamy freely speaks of the superior "reforming," or making holy, those under their biblical charge and care (see also Eph. 5:26 in this regard).
22. Sanctification through the means of the church. William Perkins points out that "it is the duty of every believer to further the good estate of the true church by the three means of: prayer, edification, and the conferring of temporal blessings (for this is the principle end for which God has given riches)." Expounding upon edification, he says, "All pertaining to the church of God, without exception, must put their helping hands to further this building, by using all good means to draw our kindred, friends, and neighbors to the love and obedience to the true religion."²³ There is once again a clear call to action, but at the same time an external acting upon the one being drawn into, and built up in the church, grown up by the ministry of the church, and cared for through the church. Puritan theologians had a category for external means acting upon those under authority "passively sanctifying" the believer (if such terminology will be allowed).
23. Sanctification through the means of the state. As far as sanctification through the external institutions are concerned, we finally arrive at the state. Suffice it to say, the Puritans saw the commonwealth as aiding in steeling oneself to avoid all forms of sluggishness and laziness.²⁴

²⁰ Gouge, *The Sabbaths Sanctification*, 40.

²¹ Thomas Brooks, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 3:104 and Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 63.

²² Edmund Calamy, *England's Looking Glass* (London: 1642), 31.

²³ William Perkins, *Treatise on Vocations*, vol. 10, *The Works of William Perkins*, (Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 82.

²⁴ Roberts et al., *Westminster Conference Papers*, 70-1.

These three institutions, which are also external means of growth in godliness, cannot be controlled by the individual. Nevertheless, the individual can entrust himself to those placed over him in the Lord, and thereby actively cultivate that which he is the recipient of. In all of this, the Puritan balance of human responsibility is evident, while at the same time they have in no way minimized God's sovereignty and ultimate responsibility. The Divines upheld every means which the Lord uses in the sanctification of the believer, while simultaneously maintaining God himself as the primary and ultimate worker in one's sanctification.

At last we conclude the overarching list of means as we finally consider:

24. Meditation upon general revelation and providence. Stephen Charnock, the English Puritan and Divine and contemporary to the Westminster Assembly, in speaking of the place of observing nature, states:

[Nothing] ... can meet our eyes but affords us lessons worthy of our thoughts, besides the general notices of the power and wisdom of the Creator. Thus may the sheep read us a lesson of patience, the dove of innocence, the ant and bee raise blushes in us for our sluggishness, and the stupid ox and dull ass correct and shame our ungrateful ignorance ... such a view of spiritual truth in sensible pictures would clear our knowledge, purify our fancies, animate our affections, encourage our graces, disgrace our vices, and both argue and snare us into duty, and thus take away all the causes of our wild wandering thoughts at once.²⁵

Notice once again the simultaneous call to personal activity and yet functional passivity. God uses that which is external to the believer in order to bring about sanctification. The believer's mind is actively engaged in the observation of these things, and yet the Lord is using his works of creation and providence to draw the Christian's mind heavenward—to think upon heavenly truths as prompted by that which one observes.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but perhaps one final catchall could be mentioned at this point. All the Assembly would heartily affirm and uphold as woven throughout the others that obedience to the law of Christ regardless of one's mood, emotions, or spiritual state is necessary. This notion is unfolded from the biblical concept that "obedience is better than sacrifice."

More, of course, could be said on all of these points. But this list of twenty-four aides to the believer's holiness can stand as thoroughly representative of the Divine's thinking. While the above twenty-four stated items may appear to be little more than a dry list and mere recitation of the sundry means which the Lord has provided to His children, the variety of ways the Lord sanctifies those whom He loves is perfectly evident. Human responsibility is most certainly at the fore, but we also find that which acts upon the believer as external means in our sanctification. We see the usefulness of others in our growth in holiness, the function of the institutions of family, church, and state, and the place of providence in growing us in character. In other words, it is as though the Lord uses every means possible—every *lawful* means possible—in bringing about our holiness. At the same time, the Lord in His Word calls upon every believer to use those lawful means to advance one's holiness.

Summary & Conclusion: How Then Does God Progressively Sanctify the Believer?

Sanctification, simply put, is the work of God. But it is a work of God wherein He calls and enables active effort in walking in step with the work of the Spirit. He uses the means of grace,

²⁵ Steven Charnock, *Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2010), 5:309.

Word, sacrament, prayer, the Sabbath Day, Christian fellowship, as well as the help of others (Heb. 12, Eph. 5). He draws upon circumstances and His work of providence, good and ill, trial and blessing, causing all of these to grow one's character. He leverages His work of creation and the importance of general revelation. He takes the believer's Spirit-wrought holy efforts, as well as the Spirit's direct intervention, in making the Christian more holy. It is as though God brings every means, even the full gospel itself, to bear upon the believer in one's purification, thereby underscoring the notion that "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Even the *ordo salutis* is brought to bear upon one's sanctification. God eternally and unalterably decrees His children to be holy—they are elected unto holiness, united to Christ who is their holiness, and their sins are atoned for that they might be holy unto the Lord. Then they are effectually called to be holy, and irresistibly willed to be holy, otherwise the believer would eternally resist and remain unholy. Next they are regenerated unto holiness, by faith, and are enabled to repent from unholiness and unto holiness. After they are justified and granted initial holiness, they are sanctified progressively in holiness, and they will be glorified unto final and perfected holiness. The command to "be holy as I am holy" will be irrevocably accomplished in the believers life, for, after all, "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3)!

The actuality of one's holiness flows from the reality of the Gospel itself—for God brings the full weight of the Gospel to bear upon one becoming like Him.²⁶ And while God's work in sanctification is established, man's call to vigorous obedience is never overthrown. In fact, just the opposite—human ability and responsibility to obey is established and upheld. Therefore it can rightly be said: use every means afforded to you to actively cultivate the salvation that has been worked in you, knowing that "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

In conclusion, one final illustration of the above balance will be given. In Ephesians 5, a chapter on marriage and the godly functioning of the home, we are met with a passage on sanctification that we often overlook as a passage on how one is made more and more holy by the Lord. Paul says, starting in verse twenty-five:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands...

There are several things to note about this passage. First, means are present (washing of the water with the Word). Second, the church's responsibility for her own sin is never overthrown or dismissed out of hand. Her sins are hers. Her blemishes are her own. And yet, third, Christ does not treat the church's sin as *our* responsibility, but He takes responsibility for our sins as *His* responsibility. He is unswervingly committed to eliminating it, that He might present us spotless on the last great day. Praise be to God, our Triune God, that He is the one who sanctifies. Otherwise, the church's efforts would be altogether fruitless!

²⁶ Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, 123-5.