

2 Cor. 7:1 (WCF 13:2-3) “Perfecting Holiness”

For the Children: Sometimes at school you have two boys who are always fighting. Maybe they both want to be in charge, but they can't both run the show since they have different ideas on how things should be done. So they fight to see who will get to call the shots. Some kids gather round to cheer them on, others run to tell the teacher. The devil is always fighting against God because he wants to call the shots. So when God makes us one of His children, the devil makes sure there is a fight on – over who will run the life of the believer, God or the devil. We know we should take God's side in that fight. But part of us keeps siding with the devil, cheering him on. So we have a fight within ourselves. That's a fight that lasts the whole of our life. **Questions:** Who is going to win that fight – God or the devil? How can we improve our “fighting skills” against the devil? How close to perfect do you think you'll become by the end of your life?

Introduction:

First Point: Total Sanctification

- 1) **The Need for Further Cleansing:** The fact that the believer needs to cleanse himself from defilement (being smeared with filth) shows that we are not yet fully sanctified. As Paul shows in Rom. 7, we have a new, spiritual nature placed within us; but that new nature is placed in a person who is still affected by sin. Therefore there is a constant struggle by the Holy Spirit, working with our new nature, against the old nature
- 2) **Total, Not Absolute:** Sin (the “remnant of corruption,” WCF 13:2) affects every part of who we are, through our old nature – our mind, emotions, will, body and soul. To use the terms of the text, both “flesh and spirit” are defiled. But the sinner's depravity is not “absolute” – he is not as consistently bad as he could be. Similarly, our sanctification is “total” – it affects every believer at every level of his being – but not absolute in practice in this life (only in principle in Christ). Perhaps this is to teach us greater humility, dependence on the Lord and a stronger sense of gratitude for His grace
- 3) **How Far We Fall:** Because of this remaining corruption, believers sometimes “back-slide” a long way. The corruption prevails over our decisions, but only for a time. The Lord gives strength to overcome, and eventually the true believer will avail himself of this help and make progress again

Second Point: Progressive Sanctification

- 1) **Help to Progress:** Because the Lord's agenda is that we make progress in sanctification, He supplies us with strength to resist sin and pursue holiness. He does this by means of His Word and Spirit, on the ground of Christ's work for us. The Word supplies instruction on right and wrong, warnings and admonitions against sin; reasons to be grateful for mercy and to hope in a good outcome. The Spirit enables us to lay hold of these things inwardly. Note that it is the promises of God that are mentioned here, not the commandments. Though both serve His purpose in sanctifying us, the promise of present help and of final salvation particularly motivate us for pursuing holiness
- 2) **Work to Progress:** Sanctification is initiated by the Lord, but we are called to co-operate with the Spirit in seeking to “cleanse ourselves.” We do so by praying for the Lord's help; turning to His Word to teach us about sin and holiness, grace, hope etc; by examining ourselves so we see where work is most urgently needed; and by acting with determination to resist sin and do good. It is often in the last step that we fall down – not acting on what we know
- 3) **The End in Sight:** The Lord's goal is our “perfecting in holiness.” “Perfecting” means *completing*. In the next life, this will result in absolute perfection. For now, it is a work in progress. If we see in Christ the final goal of perfect holiness – the image into which God is transforming us - love of Him should drive us on to co-operate in this work at present

Conclusion:

