

Sanctification, Part 3 of 3

NLMC Burbank Adult SS Class
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Review last week:

Charles Hodge: How is a soul gradually transformed into the image of Christ?

"First, it is led to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ... This is the first step, and secures all the rest

"Second, the soul by this act of faith becomes united to Christ. We are in Him by faith. The consequences of this union are, (a) Participation in his merits. His perfect righteousness ... is imputed to the believer. He is thereby justified ... (b) Another consequence of the union with Christ effected by faith, is the indwelling of the Spirit ... Where the Spirit is, there Christ is; so that, the Spirit being with us, Christ is with us; and if the Spirit dwells in us, Christ dwells in us. In partaking, therefore, of the Holy Ghost, believers are partakers of the life of Christ

"Third, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit thus secured by union with Christ becomes the source of a new spiritual life, which constantly increases in power until everything uncongenial with it is expelled, and the soul is perfectly transformed into the image of Christ" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, 226-9).

Practical Helps in the Pursuit of Sanctification by faith

If sanctification is faith → Christ → Spirit, then we need increased faith. What are the means that God has given to strengthen our faith in Christ, leading to a closer walk with Christ and the experience of Christ dwelling in us by his Spirit?

The means of grace = means of faith

The Continental Reformed tradition has two: word and sacraments

Heidelberg Catechism # 65. "Q. Since, then, **faith** alone makes us share in Christ and all his benefits, where does such faith originate? A. The Holy Spirit creates it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and **confirms it** by the use of the holy sacraments."

The Anglo-Scottish Reformed tradition has three: word, sacraments & prayer

Shorter Catechism # 88. "Q. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption? A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation."

I think the Anglo-Scottish tradition is right to include prayer, because prayer is communion with God. What could be more important for our spiritual growth than that?

However, I like the Heidelberg Catechism too. I like the way it connects the means of grace with faith. The means of grace are essentially *means of faith*. The Spirit, by the preaching of the Word, creates faith in our hearts. By the sacraments – and I would add, prayer – the Spirit strengthens and confirms our faith.

As we will see later, I actually believe there are at least two additional means of grace as well, which are not mentioned in the Reformed confessions, but are certainly biblical – God’s providence and Christian fellowship. Thus in my lesson this morning, we are going to look at the 5 practical helps that God has given us in order to strengthen our faith and thereby to promote spiritual growth and progressive sanctification.

1) The Word

John 17:17: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

- a. It tells you who Christ is and what he has done for you (the gospel)
Rom. 10:17: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”
- b. It tells you who *you* are in Christ (indicative)
Example: Col. 2:9-14
- c. It sweetly calls you to be who you are in Christ (imperative)
Example: Col. 3:1-11; 1 Cor. 6:12-20

2) The Sacraments

The Second Helvetic Confession XIX: “Sacraments are mystical symbols ... whereby ... he seals his promises, and outwardly represents, and, as it were, offers unto our sight those thing which inwardly he performs for us, and so **strengthens and increases our faith** through the working of God’s Spirit in our hearts.”

- a. Baptism - reminds you who you are in Christ, that you belong to Christ

“It is given for the arousing, nourishing, and confirming of our faith”
(Calvin, Institutes IV.xv.14)

Rom. 6:3-4, 11

Listen to the voice of Christ as he speaks to you in baptism
and believe that you are in fact dead to sin and alive to God in Christ

Baptism into Christ means your life is hidden with Christ.

b. The Lord's Supper – feeding upon Christ's body and blood by faith

John 6:51-56

Calvin: "As it is not the seeing but the eating of bread that suffices to feed the body, so the soul must truly and deeply become partaker of Christ that it may be quickened to spiritual life by his power ... In this way, the Lord intended, by calling himself the 'bread of life,' to teach not only that salvation for us rests on faith in his death and resurrection, but also that, by true partaking of him, his life passes into us and is made ours – just as bread when taken as food imparts vigor to the body" (Institutes IV.xvii.5).

WCF 29.7: "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death."

3) Prayer

- a. Confessing your sins – 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- b. Asking the Lord for strength to fight against sin and become more holy.
- c. Communing with Christ – developing a personal relationship with Christ.

The key to getting more of the Spirit is feeding upon Christ by faith, which means, communing with Christ in prayer.

Jesus is your Lord. He purchased you with his blood. You belong to him.

"I belong – body and soul, in life and in death – not to myself, but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism).

You are his servant – "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus" (Rom. 1:1).

Therefore, you can ask him for his Spirit, that he might dwell in your heart by faith, by his Spirit. One of my favorite prayers in all the Bible is Eph. 3:14-19.

One of the most important Scriptural metaphors for explaining this communion that believers have with the Lord Jesus Christ is the analogy of the marriage relationship.

Rom. 7:4: "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to

another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God."

2 Cor. 11:2: "I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin."

Eph. 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her ... that he might present to himself the church in all her glory."

John Owen: "He is married unto us, and we unto him; which spiritual relation is attended with suitable conjugal affections. And this gives us fellowship with him as to his personal excellencies. This the spouse expresses, Cant. 2:16, 'My Beloved is mine, and I am his;' – 'He is mine, I possess him, I have interest in him, as my head and my husband; and I am his, possessed of him, owned by him, given up unto him: and that as to my Beloved in a conjugal relation.' ... Christ gives himself to the soul, with all his excellencies, righteousness, graces, and eminences, to be its Savior, head, and husband, forever to dwell with it in this holy relation ... This is the first thing *on the part of Christ* -- the free donation and bestowing of himself upon us to be our Christ, our Beloved ... *On the part of the saints*, it is their free, willing consent to receive, embrace, and submit unto the Lord Jesus, as their husband, Lord, and Savior – to abide with him, subject their souls unto him, and to be ruled by him forever. Now this in the soul is either initial, or the solemn consent at the first entrance of union; or consequential, in renewed acts of consent all our days. I speak of it especially in this latter sense, wherein it is proper unto communion ... Let believers exercise their hearts abundantly unto this thing. This is choice communion with the Son Jesus Christ. Let us receive him in all his excellencies, as he bestows himself upon us – be frequent in thoughts of faith, comparing him with other beloveds, sin, world, legal righteousness; and preferring him before them, counting them all loss and dung in comparison of him ... Let us tell him that we will be for him, and not for another" (*Communion with God, Works, vol. II, pp. 54-59*)

4) God's providence, especially trials

According to Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." And what is God's purpose? That we should become conformed to the image of his Son. Therefore, God's providence is another means of grace.

Berkhof: "God's providences, both favorable and adverse, are often powerful means of sanctification" (p. 536).

Acts 14:22; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:10; Heb. 5:8; 12:10-11

Why are trials important for sanctification? Because they test and confirm our faith – James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7. They wean us from the passing things of earth and draw our affections closer to Christ. The less we value earthly things, the more we value Christ. And the more we value Christ, the more we have a sense of his Spirit in our hearts - Rom. 5:3-5.

5) Fellowship with other Christians

Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:23-25

Again, how does this work? Our faith is strengthened as we see the faith that God has put in other Christians around us – Rom. 1:8-12.

My experience in the Philippines – after each day the team members would get together to debrief, and we would share what we did and what we experienced that day in the course of our ministry.

We need godly models to imitate – 1 Cor. 11:1. Imitate those who are most Christ-like.