

PCA Sanctification Issues

I. Human Sexuality Study Committee (My “quick” w/o Committee nuance)

Key Background Understanding: The unique calling of the PCA (treasuring Reformed Theology and Missionary Zeal), creating a natural and persistent tension of between *Protecting Orthodoxy* and *Promoting Mission*.

A. Preamble of the Report:

Not Giving into *Compromise* or *Fear*:

1. Commitment to Biblical Orthodoxy (sin as sin)
2. Commitment to Gospel Mission (Grace greater than all our sin)

B. 12 Statements

Formatted *not* as ...Truth and Qualification
but as ...Truth and Application

1. All sexual intimacy outside marriage of a man and woman is sin
 2. Homosexuality is sin
 - Homosexual *expression* is sin
 - Homosexual *desire* is sin (even if not chosen)
 - + Homosexual expression and desire Must be repented of
 - + Homosexual expression and desire Can be repented of
 - even if progress is uneven
 - even if progress is incomplete
- ◊Obedience is required; progress is expected – even if imperfect in this life

C. Theological Guidance (e.g., concupiscence and progressive sanctification)

D. Pastoral Perspectives (e.g., correction and counsel)

- Those who have some degree of SSA, but are repentant and obedient are not disqualified from church life or office
- “Identity” language (unwise v. disciplinable)

E. Apologetic for Biblical Marriage (the power of celebration)

F. Bibliography (Need to know, not recommending all views)

Conclusion: Relationships of Committee as hope for the PCA

II. Key Confessional Perspectives: Answering the Imperative Question

Human Sexuality Study Report (2021), Statement 7: Sanctification

We affirm that Christians should flee immoral behavior and not yield to temptation. By the power of the Holy Spirit working through the ordinary means of grace, Christians should seek to wither, weaken, and put to death the underlying idolatries and sinful desires that lead to sinful behavior. The goal is not just consistent fleeing from, and regular resistance to, temptation, but the diminishment and even the end of the occurrences of sinful desires through the reordering of the loves of one's heart toward Christ. Through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, we can make substantial progress in the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Rom. 6:14-19; Heb. 12:14; 1 John 4:4; *WCF* 13.1).

...This process of sanctification—even when the Christian is diligent and fervent in the application of the means of grace—will always be accompanied by many weaknesses and imperfections (*WCF* 16.5, 6), with the Spirit and the flesh warring against one another until final glorification (*WCF* 13.2). The believer who struggles with same-sex attraction should expect to see the regenerate nature increasingly overcome the remaining corruption of the flesh, but this progress will often be slow and uneven. Moreover, the process of mortification and vivification involves the whole person, not simply unwanted sexual desires. The aim of sanctification in one's sexual life cannot be reduced to attraction to persons of the opposite sex (though some persons may experience movement in this direction), but rather involves growing in grace and perfecting holiness in the fear of God (*WCF* 13.3).

Westminster Confession of Faith (XIII. "Of Sanctification")

They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces....

This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

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

Westminster Confession of Faith (XVI. 2, 3, 5, 6 "Of Good Works")

[G]ood works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: ... Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves but wholly from the Spirit of Christ."

"We cannot by our best works merit pardon for sin ... by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God...; by them [i.e., our best works] we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have but done our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because, as they are good, they proceed from his spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment..... [B]elievers being accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unproveable in God's sight."

Westminster Confession (XX. 1 “Of Christian Liberty...”; XIX. 6, 7 “Of the Law of God”)

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and in their being delivered from . . . the dominion of sin . . . ; as also, in their free access to God and their yielding obedience to him, not out of a slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.

...(A) man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.

III. The relationship between the imperative and the indicative

WCF XIX (“Of the Law of God”): Obedience to the Law required [Imperatives]

“Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.”

WCF XVI (“Of Good Works”): Works unacceptable but for union with Christ [Indicatives]

“[G]ood works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith. . . ; by them [i.e., our good works] we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have but done our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and because, as they are good, they proceed from his spirit; and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's judgment. . . . [B]elievers being accepted through Christ, their good works are also accepted in him.”

“The **imperative** rests on the **indicative** and the order is not reversible.” Who we are *in Christ* is the basis and power for what we do that pleases God (cf. Deut. 5:5; Eph. 5:1). The indicatives: justified, adopted, sanctified (positional-Rom. 12:1; Heb. 10:14); united to Christ (Gal. 2:20); loved – never more and never less.

(see H. Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of his Theology*, 1975, p 253)

IV. The Motivations for the Imperatives: Answering the Why Question

WCF XX (“Of Christian Liberty”): *Prime motivation for obedience to law is love for God*
“The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin ... as also, in their free access to God and their yielding obedience to him, not out of a slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.”

Human Sexuality Report (2021), Statement 7: “... the diminishment and even the end of the occurrences of sinful desires [is] through the reordering of the loves of one’s heart toward Christ.”

(Standard Motivation Errors: Missing the Plurality *and* Priority of Biblical Motivations)

1. Love for God

Revealing grace in all the Scriptures is more than an interpretative scheme; it is the chief expository means by which the preacher may provide consistent adulation of the mercy of God in Christ in order to prompt our love for God that is the most powerful motivation for Christian obedience.

Matthew 22:36-8

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. (Mat 22:36-38)

Rom. 12: 1 “I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

2. Love for others loved by God (leads to mission, mercy and service)

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40).

3. Love for self as one loved by God (w/o which rewards & warnings accomplish nothing)

a. Claiming the rights and privileges of our inheritance in Christ

Grace is bestowed and the relation established by sovereign divine administration. How then are we to construe the conditions of which we have spoken? ...They are simply the reciprocal responses of faith, love and obedience, apart from which the enjoyment of the covenant blessing and of the covenant relation is inconceivable. (John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 1953, rpt.).

b. Avoidance of the consequences of sin revealed by a loving God. (If God did not love us, he would not warn us of sin’s consequences. Warnings to *believers* must be framed in the context of fatherly love.)

cf. saving discipline (expressed toward us regularly) vs. retributive punishment (inflicted on Christ once for all): We may experience discipline as a result of our sin but, fatherly discipline even when harsh is still an expression of love for a child's welfare (Heb. 12:6).

- ◆ Thus, there are many motivations for obedience: fear of consequences, desire for blessing (i.e., love of self), concern for others (i.e., love of others loved by Christ), and love for God – **but since love of God is the primary motivation in holiness, it must be our primary message and means for motivating holiness.**

V. The Power for the Imperatives: Answering the How Question

A. Knowledge is Power

1. *What* Honors God and Blesses Us (Doctrine and Duty)
2. *Who* You Are (**Human** – vulnerable and helped by practical (I Cor. 10:13; Prov. 4:14-15); **Redeemed** – loved by the Father, united to Christ, indwelt by the Spirit = **New Creation** (II Cor. 5:17, Gal. 2:20; I Jn. 4:4, ~~not~~ *able not to sin*=Rom. 6:6 & 14)

- ◆ Key Understanding: “New creation”
WCF XIII: They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them.
- ◆ Key Understanding: “No longer a slave”
WCF III: ...the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified....
WCF XVI: The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and in their being delivered from . . . the dominion of sin . . .
- ◆ Key Question: The *primary* reason the redeemed sin? (Jm. 1:13-14; Jn. 3:3)

If the sin did not attract us

B. Love is Power

WCF.XX:

“The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin ... as also, in their free access to God and their yielding obedience to him, not out of a slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.”

Human Sexuality Report, Statement 7: “... the diminishment and even the end of the occurrences of sinful desires [is] through the reordering of the loves of one’s heart toward Christ.

How do we displace love for sin? A Greater Love!

John Owen: “The way that you remove the power of anything is by taking away its life source; the life source of sin is our love for it. Take that away and sin has no power” (*The Mortification of Sin*, paraphrase).

Thomas Chalmer's, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection."

1. What is the source of love? I Jn. 4:19 – "We love because..."
2. What is the effect of love?
 - a. Holiness: Love to walk with him. John 14:15- "If you love me..."; Titus 2:11,12 - "The grace of God teaches us..."
 - b. Service: Love of *what* and *whom* he loves. II Cor. 5:14- "the love of Christ controls"; Matt. 25:40- "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."
3. How to build love? Means of Grace ≠ Means to Grace (bread not bribes)

Conclusion: Filling Up the Heart with Love for God