

Sanctification, the Law, and Good Works: Their Relationship in the American Reformed Tradition[‡]

By C. N. Willborn

INTRODUCTION

When the Apostle Paul said that Christ Jesus “became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” (1 Cor 1:30 ESV),¹ he was making a significant soteriological, as well as Christological, statement. Important for our consideration is the Pauline notion that Christ “became for us . . . sanctification.” Since we believe the Holy Scriptures to be necessary, authoritative, perspicuous, and sufficient, we must take seriously the teaching of this verse of the Bible. Toward that end, Charles Hodge, the eminent Princeton theologian, commenting on this passage, wrote: “*sanctification*, or holiness, is that which satisfies the law as a rule of duty.”² In bringing the Hodge quote forward at this juncture, it is our purpose to simply show the relationship of the doctrine of sanctification to a standard or rule of duty, as Hodge phrased it. Furthermore, that rule of duty is to be understood as the moral law of God. This is the understanding of Hodge and numerous scholars who stand in the American Reformed Tradition and the Westminster Tradition.

The purpose of this paper is to consider and expose an aspect of Reformed soteriology that was too often neglected throughout the twentieth century. We could deal with the various causes of the dubious beliefs that grew up during that period—Fundamentalism, Social Gospel, and Liberalism—but the end result, its neglect, is our concern. It is true that sanctification as a *locus* of theology rightly found its place in the systematic works of the past (and present). However, it was often neglected in the twentieth century in broader literature. For example, one looking for an entry under the heading of sanctification in the *Westminster Theological Journal* will come away musing over the discovery. There is not one entry under the heading of sanctification to be found. While references are made to sanctification

as a “subject,” there are no titles suggesting a treatment of the doctrine. In the same search of *The Journal of Evangelical Theology* a total of seven “titles” and a pitiful few more “subjects” are found. Still, a surprising revelation for two theological journals committed to reformed and evangelical theology.

Beyond these widely recognized North American journals there were some that addressed the topic, but none with any degree of specificity.³ Therefore, it would seem wise at this point early in the twenty-first century, on behalf of the church, to consider this doctrine a bit more. Given much of the atmosphere in the American Reformed community these days, our treatment will focus on *specific means* toward growing in the grace of holiness as set forth within the Reformed tradition. To accomplish this in some degree in our allotted space, we shall consider how representative American Reformed theologians pursued this topic. Specifically, we

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[‡]This paper had its origin many years ago when the author sat in class with D. Clair Davis, PhD, in a PhD seminar at Westminster Theological Seminary. It was Dr. Davis who encouraged the exploration in the topic and commended the author in his study of the American Reformed view on this topic.

1. Unless otherwise noted all Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version, Crossway, 2001, 2007.

2. Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (1857 and 1859; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 27.

3. There are three journal articles appearing in 1955, which reference members of the American Reformed Tradition, as well as Calvin. For this reason, they deserve honorable mention. Pierre Marcel, “The Relation between Justification and Sanctification in Calvin’s Thought,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (July-September 1955): 133–45; R. B. Larter, “The Doctrine of Sanctification,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (July-September 1955): 146–52; and J. I. Packer, “‘Keswick’ and The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 27 (July-September 1955): 153–67.

shall examine the role of the moral law of God as summarized in the Decalogue (hereafter referred to as “the law”) and good works in relation to sanctification.

In considering our topic we shall consider five American theologians of Reformed commitment. These men represent major regions and schools of 18th and 19th century America: Jonathan Edwards (New England), Charles Hodge (Mid-Atlantic), Robert L. Dabney (Tide-water), and James Henley Thornwell (Southeast), and John Murray (Westminster). These men, with the exception of Edwards, are representative of significant schools of theological learning, which we shall designate as “old Princeton,” “old Union,” “old Columbia” and “Westminster.”⁴

JONATHAN EDWARDS: THE NEW ENGLAND SCHOOL

Jonathan Edwards is perhaps the most celebrated theological and philosophical figure in 18th century American Colonialism. His work on the human will continues to garner the attention of scholars in multiple disciplines. The grandson of the influential New England Congregationalist, Solomon Stoddard, Edwards was endowed with tremendous gifts intellectually. His role in the Great Awakening has been chronicled in numerous books and academic journal articles. His biographers are many.⁵ There is hardly any topic on the theological landscape that does not require at least a token look into Edwards’ viewpoint.

As with his Puritan predecessors, sanctification was a focus of Edwards’ teaching and preaching. This is seen not only in his *Religious Affections* and *Nature of True Virtue*, but also in his monumental *Justification by Faith Alone*. In the latter, Edwards was insistent upon “a sound doctrine of sanctification as a corollary of justification.”⁶

4. By using the “old” designation most readers will understand that reference is to those schools prior their liberalizing in the first half of the 20th century. Old Union refers to Virginia, not New York.

5. Two suggested biographies are George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) and Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987). See also Douglas Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

6. John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1992), 3:224. Also see the discussion of “evangelical obedience” in relation to justification in Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 1:635ff.

7. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1:834, 835.

8. For a useful discussion of Edwards’ use of law and love see Gerstner, 3:245–53.

In the justification treatises he presents his view of good works and their relation to believers’ rewards. For Edwards, evangelical obedience, or good works, is absolutely necessary for salvation, while contributing nothing meritorious toward justification. Upon this topic, Edwards stands in a line of agreement with Calvin, Turretin and the American Reformers to follow him (Gerstner, 1:225–28).

It is noteworthy that there appears to be some degree of discontinuity (of expression at least) between Edwards and Calvin when it comes to the role of the law in the sanctification of the believer. Calvin has no quibble with speaking of the law in relation to our sanctification or growth in grace. For instance, in his discussion of “Christian Freedom” he says that an individual’s works of law have no place in the question of how one becomes righteous. However, man cannot “rightly infer from this that the law is superfluous for believers, since it does not stop teaching and exhorting and urging them to good, even though before God’s judgment seat it has no place in their consciences.”⁷ Furthermore, Calvin insists, “The whole life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness, for we have been called to *sanctification*. . . . Here it is the function of *the law*, by warning men of their duty, to arouse them to a zeal for holiness and innocence (*Ibid.*; emphasis added). Edwards, on the other hand, refers to “Divine love”⁸ when speaking of the law. He draws almost exclusively from the gospel, teaching that the love of God and of others is paramount to law keeping. For example, when our Lord answered the Pharisees as to “the great commandment in the Law,” he said: “You shall love the Lord your God. . . . And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:36–39; Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18). For Edwards “all duty is comprehended in love.” Yet, it is essential to a proper understanding of Edwards to recognize “there is no duty of heart, or due disposition of mind, but what is included in the “Law and the Prophets”, and is required by some precept of that law and rule which He has given mankind to walk by” (Gerstner, 3:246).

Thus, Edwards seeks to avoid a “legalism” when speaking of law-keeping by using the concept of love as motivational. In stressing the Biblical notion of love as the Christian’s proper motivation, unlike Calvin, he risks the compromise of the standard or content of the love, namely the law. The risk seems more liable due to misunderstanding than anything else. In the end it would appear that we are speaking of emphasis and not necessarily the intent or substance of their preaching and teaching at this point. One could argue, however, that a proper Calvinian emphasis upon the law would

perhaps have tempered the abuses which followed the Edwardian tradition.

The difference in emphasis may be owing to Edwards' Puritan lineage. His accent in addressing his congregation might well be illustrated by the English Puritan, Richard Sibbes, in his treatise entitled "The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax." In this sermon on the topic of the Christian life and sanctification, Sibbes explored sanctification in relation to the "spiritual government of Christ" and then sets forth "means to make Grace victorious." He discusses seven "means of grace," all of which deal with reflection upon God's providence, Christ's salvation, and the effectual work of the Spirit. There is no specific mention of the law or even a general mention of the word of God, though one must surely assume the latter at least.⁹ Indeed, it would seem wrong to think otherwise in light of his insistence on "true principles" and the *a priori* relation of the principles to our affections and actions. Sibbes said as much when he wrote: "It is good, therefore, to store up true principles in our hearts and to refresh them often, that in virtue of them our affections and actions may be more vigorous" (1:88). The true principles which are to be stored in our hearts can be none other than the teachings of holy Scripture and sounds much like Psalm 119:11—"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Yet, it is understandable that he would put much emphasis on grace and love in this treatise, as he is dealing with Christ's actions toward His delicate subjects, His bruised reeds.

In another treatise, "The Soul's Conflict," Sibbes utilizes the law of God to aid in the struggles of the Christian life. The conflict referenced is in the life of the believer. Sibbes explains: "Consider the spiritualness and large extent of the law of God, together with the curse annexed, which forbids not only particular sins, but all the kinds, degrees, occasions, and furtherances of sin in the whole breadth and depth of it, and our very nature itself, so far as it is corrupted; for want of which we see many 'alive without the law,' Rom. vii. 9, jovial and merry from ignorance of their misery, who, if they did but once see their natures and lives in that glass, it would take away that liveliness and courage from them, and make them vile in their own eyes" (1:176). So the law is vital to our progress in holiness so that we may not, like the world, remain "jovial and merry from ignorance of their misery." Furthermore, Sibbes argued for the utility of the law in our holiness when he said: "The spiritualness and purity of the law should teach us to consider the purity and holiness of God; the bringing of our soul into whose presence will make us to abhor ourselves,

with Job, 'in dust and ashes,' Job xlii. 6. Contraries are best seen by setting one near the other; whilst we look only on ourselves, and upon others amongst whom we live, we think ourselves to be somebody. It is an evidence of some sincerity wrought in the soul, not to shun that light which may let us see the foul corners of our hearts and lives" (1:176). The law of God is expressed as "light" by Sibbes. As one must read Sibbes broadly to gather his full teaching on the pursuit of holiness, because he did not write a systematic treatment where one might run to see a comprehensive treatment on the topic, so one must read Edwards broadly to gather a true understanding of his view. But this is true of many is it not? It could be said of Calvin and a number of Puritans who did not write systematic theologies.¹⁰

It is beyond refutation that Jonathan Edwards, as an early member of the American Reformed Tradition, sees the integral importance of good works for the sanctification of the believer. Good works are means whereby believers are sanctified. However, when it comes to speaking of the law in relation to sanctification, he does not always provide clear guidance to those good works. Indeed, he does not appear always to share in Calvin's principal use of the law, or *tertius usus legis*, for the Christian as a rule of life. Calvin said: "The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns" (*Institutes*, 1:360). Again, drawing on the breadth of Scripture, Calvin says, "The law is to the flesh like a whip to an idle and balking ass, to arouse it to work" (*Ibid.*, 361). Edwards' accent, as we have shown, tended heavily on love for Christ. In departing from Calvin's emphasis at this point, Edwards makes a crucial mistake.¹¹ The law, whether wittingly or not, is

9. Richard Sibbes, *Works of Richard Sibbes* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 1.88–90.

10. The author recollects learning early on that Calvin must be read, not simply in his commentaries, or the *Institutes*, but also in his letters and treatises to gain a fair understanding of his thought. Because he did not write a systematic theology *per se* (the *Institutes* notwithstanding), it requires greater labor to discern his position on any number of doctrines.

11. In a different context, we should like to examine the relationship between Edwards' departure from Calvin and Turretin's law emphasis and his eventual ecclesiastical problems at Northampton. Perhaps his emphasis on love as the motivation for sanctification should have been better balanced with discussions of the substance of sanctifying love, namely obedience to law. By overemphasizing the motivation he had provided, emotionally at least, the ground for the Northampton congregation to follow "the commandments of men" (namely his grandfather) rather than the law of God. This discussion is outside the parameters of our present discussion so we shall leave it for another paper or historian to explore.

de-emphasized and, thus, its regulative role in the Christian life is undermined and potentially misunderstood by those with antinomian tendencies or those suffering from a legalistic background.

CHARLES HODGE: THE OLD PRINCETON SCHOOL

When one shifts attention to the influential Princeton school of thought, a spiritual successor to Edwards in many regards, issues become more clearly representative of an American Reformed Tradition. The name most immediately associated with Princeton Seminary, especially in the 19th century, is that of Charles Hodge (1797–1878), “the Pride of Princeton.”¹² Hodge was a product of those early Princeton Seminary days when Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller labored in the small New Jersey township on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) and in so doing established a most influential model for theological education.

Hodge provides a clear picture of good works, the law, and their relationships to the Christian’s holiness. Indeed, good works and sanctification are discussed by Hodge under the same chapter heading in his enduring and influential *Systematic Theology*. His fuller argument is represented in this seminal comment: “By good works, in this connection, are meant not only the inward exercises of the religious life, but also outward acts, such as can be seen and appreciated by others.”¹³ Good works include outward acts as well as the internal motivation. Hodge has already established the necessity of this in his commitment to the Reformed/Calvinian insistence “that sanctification is inseparable from justification, and that the one is as essential as the other” (3:238).

Because sanctification and justification are equally essential to the Christian life, Hodge argues for the necessity of good works. So the “outward acts” or good works of the law are not just effects of the “inward exercises” but in a sense they condition the inward exercises. Hodge elicits the support of NT passages that speak of mortification (putting to death sin) or putting off the old man and vivification (living to righteousness) or

putting on the new man (3:223–26). Specifically, Hodge draws upon Peter’s brief statement: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). Here we see that Christ’s work on the cross not only provided the ground for one’s justification, but also provided for one’s sanctification, *i.e.*, “die to sin and live to righteousness.” Note the purpose clause Peter utilized to communicate this theological truth—Christ died *so that* we might die to sin/lawlessness and live to righteousness. After all, what is putting to death of sin except to put off lawlessness in exchange for law-keeping (1 Jn 3:4)? The Princetonian also draws on Paul’s challenge to the Ephesians: “But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:20–24). Additionally, Hodge utilizes Romans 7:7–25 to make this point with reference to the utility of the law as spiritual, good, and holy.

When we say that the outward exercises that are contrary to lawlessness, thus lawful living, condition in some sense our inward exercises, we mean that the more we do those good works, which God prepared beforehand for us (Eph 2:10), the more our inner being is confirmed both by the Holy Spirit’s testimony and one’s conscience. One might call this emphasis of Hodge “circuitous sanctification.” By circuitous sanctification we are referring to the nature of sanctification and its relationship to regeneration,¹⁴ the Holy Spirit, and the means of grace such as good works and the law.

The “circuitous” idea allows us to see that the new life principle, which is not at enmity with God—informed by the Holy Spirit in accordance with the will of God (which we shall see is synonymous with the law), and energized by the love of God for his will—performs good works. These good works provide experiential proof of the trustworthiness of God’s word and the actual work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. Hodge presses this notion of “experience” in relation to the inward work of the Spirit and the fulfillment of covenant promises—“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). When the believer sees his life actions being transformed into the image of Christ, he further recognizes the trustworthiness of Christ and His Scriptures (3:238). This in turn confirms in the regenerate soul the truth that the new nature is gradually triumphing over evil. With greater confidence in the regenerate nature

12. For a fine recent biography on the life and work of Hodge see Andrew Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011).

13. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1871; repr. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 3:232.

14. John Murray’s definition of regeneration is being followed here. See *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), 95–105.

and the indwelling Spirit, the believer is provided the impetus to do more good works according to God's revealed will, as Hodge is accustomed to speaking. Thus, we see how the process of sanctification runs in a circuitous manner making all the elements essential to a strong doctrine of sanctification.

When Hodge, therefore, claims that good works are the fruit of sanctification he is making a statement of means as well as effect. Without good works there is no sanctification of believers. In saying this, it is essential that means and cause not be confused. Means are those instruments used by the Holy Spirit to produce the desired effect in the regenerate, namely, holiness. Means, in the American Reformed Tradition, do not possess power or merit as in the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian religions.

What about the law in relation to sanctification and good works? We have already tipped the hand to Hodge's position with the acknowledgement that good works are lawful deeds. Thus, Hodge is forthright about the role of the law. For the elder Hodge, there are three ways in which works may be called good. First, works must be what the law prescribes in order to be called good. In this sense (albeit a restricted sense!) even the unregenerate can be said to have done some good works. Second, works are good when not only the matter but the motives and intent are what the law prescribes. And, finally, works are good if they are what the Scriptures designate as fruits of the Spirit (3:232–37). The fruits of the Spirit are those works that God commands. Specifically, "the moral law . . . is in its nature the revelation of the will of God so far as that will concerns the conduct of his creatures" (3:260).

For Hodge sanctification may be referred to as synergistic in nature. However, it is of the utmost importance to recognize that sanctification does not cease to be supernatural because of the believer's activity in the process. This is realized in Hodge's commitment to the sovereign nature of God's grace. The Reformed position and Hodge's position are summed up in Paul's instruction to the Philippians concerning the Christian life: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12,13).¹⁵ While the believer is called unto purposeful activity, it is God who is doing the work. This is a Reformed axiom.

Before leaving Hodge, it is important that we consider whether he stands in continuity with Calvin and Turretin. While Hodge does not refer to Calvin's third

use of the law, he certainly appeals to it in his practice, as has been shown above. Hodge addresses the sanctification issue in a manner which reflects more of Turretin than Calvin. To the seasoned reader of Hodge this is of no surprise since he utilized Turretin's *Elenctic Theology* in his course work for many years. This minor difference has more to do with "nuance" than substance, however, and provides no grounds for discontinuity.

As we close this brief presentation of Charles Hodge's view of sanctification and the role of good works and the law, it behooves us to remember why Hodge is deemed representative of the American Reformed Tradition. Hodge produced a three-volume systematic theology, commentaries on books of the Bible, numerous articles published in various journals, established one of the most influential theological journals in U. S. history, was an influential churchman, and taught over 3,000 candidates for the gospel ministry.

ROBERT L. DABNEY: THE OLD UNION (VA) SCHOOL

Robert Lewis Dabney (1820–98) was a minister in the PCUSA and later the PCUS. After serving as pastor for several years, he was elected to the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, then located in Farmville, Virginia, where he served the church from 1853–83. He taught Church History in his early years, but later taught Systematic Theology for which he was most well-known. In 1883, Dabney left Union to become part of the founding faculty at The University of Texas. A.A. Hodge referred to Dabney as "the best teacher of theology in the United States, if not in the world."¹⁶

For these reasons, we would be remiss not to examine Dabney's contribution to the doctrine of sanctification. Furthermore, Dabney's enormous influence was not only felt in the Mid-Atlantic States, but in the Deep South as well. Since we are concerned with determining the continuity and/or discontinuity of thought within American Reformed Tradition, the fact that Dabney is considered to present more fresh ideas than did Charles Hodge is extremely significant. Did these fresh ideas result in differences among the scholars of the Tradition? That is a question of no small significance for our discussion.

Dabney, like Hodge, discusses sanctification and good works within the same context. This is to follow

15. Systems of non-Augustinian tradition attribute this Pauline statement to the arena of justification. Therefore, we believe they miss the point when they come to sanctification.

16. Robert Lewis Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), editor's notes in dust cover.

closely in the path of Turretin. Is it significant for this discussion that both Dabney and Hodge develop their discussions of the law and sanctification under separate headings? We certainly think not. The law of God is a much broader topic than the role of the law in sanctification.

Both Dabney and Hodge discuss the various uses of the law, the meaning of the law, the classical divisions of the law (*i.e.*, ceremonial, civil, and moral) and provide expositions of the Decalogue in their formal discussions of the law. It would be ludicrous, however, to argue that because the majority of their development of the law is under a separate heading from sanctification then the law is not part of their doctrine of sanctification. Dabney settles the issue in indisputable fashion when he said, "A third, and equally essential use [of the moral law] appears to the believer, after his adoption. He is 'chosen in Christ that he should be holy'; 'redeemed from all iniquity to be Christ's peculiar people, zealous of good works.' This great end, the believer's sanctification, can only be attained in practice, by giving him a holy rule of conduct" (354; emphasis added).

This passage, taken from his chapter on "the law," affirms several truths of the American Reformed Tradition. First, Calvin's and Turretin's *tertius usus legis* could almost be said to be a *sine qua non* behind any exposition of sanctification for an American Reformed theology. Second, sanctification and good works are inseparably consigned to one another, at least in Dabney's system. Finally, sanctification and the law are intertwined in the same weave with good works. As one considers the integral relationship between law, good works, and sanctification, it is important that one realizes the confessional basis for the work of both Hodge and Dabney. Sanctification is "to the practice of true holiness" (WCF 13.1). Is "the practice of holiness" an internal exercise alone? Is "practice" not something worked out in outward exercises? What is "the practice of true holiness" if not "such as God has commanded in his holy Word" (WCF 16.1)? And what is that "commanded in his holy Word" if not "God's commandments" (WCF 16.2)? Both Hodge and Dabney worked with these confessional commitments, convinced that they were Biblical truths.

Additionally, it is important to note that Dabney understands the law to provide the standard by which the believer judges his progress in the Christian life. This is one of those "fresh ideas" that Morton Smith recognizes

in Dabney. Dabney used this idea against the Plymouth Brethren when he wrote: "As the former act [justification] passes in the forum of heaven, a tribunal not now accessible to our view, it must be practically known, according to the Scriptures, by the fruitful or sanctifying quality of the faith which the believer professes. Others can test it only thus; the man himself must test it chiefly thus. Hence, obviously, his comfort of hope is connected with his progressive sanctification, through his faith working by love. Such is the scriptural system."¹⁷ Clearly Dabney is applying the Scriptural teaching, "by their fruit you shall recognize them" (Matt 7:16). Another fresh idea has to do with the law-abiding example that Christ provided for the elect. As He kept the law, so we his followers are to keep the law (686). Dabney draws on the words of our Savior when he said, "Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:19, 20). These examples from the life of our Savior do not place Dabney at odds with the American Reformed Tradition, rather they are helpful in seeing the relationship of the law, good works, and sanctification. Also, perhaps they indicate areas of development within the Tradition.

JAMES HENLEY THORNWELL: THE OLD COLUMBIA TRADITION

James Henley Thornwell (1812–62) was a minister in the Presbyterian Church USA, and after December 1861 in the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (later PCUS). He was professor and, for a while, President of the South Carolina College (now University of South Carolina). For the last few years of his life, he was the Professor of Polemical and Didactic Theology at the Presbyterian Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina (later named Columbia Theological Seminary). Thornwell is today often most well-known for his disputes with Charles Hodge. It is true they disputed over areas of ecclesiology, *e.g.*, the eldership, the missionary enterprise of the church, Roman sacramentalism, and such. They had different allegiances when it came to theological systems, which is seen in Hodge's commitment to Turretin's *Institutes* and Thornwell's to Calvin's *Institutes*. An example of how this affected their theological views is seen in areas like soteriology and, particularly, the doctrine of adoption. Following

17. Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, 3 vols. (1891; rpr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 1:189.

Turretin, Hodge subsumed adoption under the doctrine of justification. Thornwell understood the doctrine of adoption to stand as its own head in the theological scheme. The latter's adherence to Calvin on this matter along with his own contribution opened the door for further development of the doctrine of adoption by successors.¹⁸ It also allowed for fuller and more distinct exposition of justification.¹⁹

When it comes to sanctification, however, Hodge and Thornwell are in essential agreement. Unlike Hodge, Thornwell did not produce a systematic theology where one can turn handily to find the treatment of sanctification.²⁰ However, there is ample material in his miscellaneous writings to conclude his position on the topic before us.²¹

In "Antinomianism," Thornwell begins with a statement which is fairly indicative of the American Reformed Tradition. "Those who deny that the law of God is the measure of duty," wrote Thornwell, "or that personal holiness should be sought by Christians, are those alone who can properly be charged with Antinomian principles."²² First, it should be understood that Thornwell is not commending antinomians or their "ism." Indeed, far from it, he condemns the antinomian view of God's holy law: "When, after a dreary night of Arminian darkness and of legal bondage, the doctrines of grace are proclaimed with clearness and power, there are always found men who, unable to endure the light which reveals the folly of their slavish toils and unchristian schemes, pervert the Gospel and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness" (2:384). From these samples we see that Thornwell holds to the Calvinian and Turretinian use of the moral law, convinced that it is the "light" of God and vital to the doctrines of grace, since it promotes the pursuit of personal holiness or sanctification. The moral law is the "measure of duty" or rule of life for the Christian for it is the very character of the holy God into Whose image we are being conformed.

Below we will see that Professor John Murray makes much of our being sanctified or molded into the image of the Father and the Son. Christ's glory is the goal of the Spirit's sanctifying work. But Christ's glory is also the goal of our active putting on of righteousness and putting off of unrighteousness. Thornwell anticipated the biblical-theological labors of Murray when he quoted Robert Traill: "Christ represents His Church unto God for their sanctification. Election in Christ is an eternal purpose in God heart and counsel about His people. Redemption by Christ is a Divine bargain for them and their salvation betwixt the Father and the Son. Justification is a gracious sentence of God in Christ on them

that are represented by Him for acceptance. By this act and sentence the state of their persons is favourably changed. But sanctification is a Divine work in them that changeth their heart and nature. The Spirit of sanctification is a precious gift of Divine love, and is only given to them that are in Christ and because they are in Him [Acts 3:26; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6, 7]" (2:388). Our focus here is in the changed heart and nature of the believer into the very image of the Father and the Son, which image is one of glory. This change takes place by the agency of the "Spirit of sanctification" for those who "are in Him [Christ]" and this involves what else? Thornwell answers: "Gospel sanctification is a blessed conformity of heart and life to the law or will of the lawgiver" (2:389).

Thornwell often works through the antinomian issue with eloquent comparisons of biblical justification and sanctification. A helpful example is readily at hand: "[Justification] is a relative change from being guilty to be righteous; the other is a real change from being filthy to be holy. By the one we are made near to God, by the other we are made like Him. By being justified, of aliens we are made children; by being sanctified, the enmity of the heart is slain, and the sinner made not only a faithful, loyal subject, but a loving, dutiful child" (2:389). The believer is "to be holy." This is not a legal status, though through union with Christ one owns that standing. Rather it is a moral change whereby a believer is a "loyal subject" and a "dutiful child." But what is the duty to be performed by the adopted child? The moral law as the rule of life.

The objection might be made that if we are to be dutiful and loyal in order to be more like Christ Jesus and more like our heavenly Father, then we grow closer to

18. Thornwell dealt with this doctrine in his treatment of the Covenant of Works, which can be found in *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, vol. 1. Further development can be found in John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions* (1905; rpr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1986).

19. See Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, but esp. 1:484ff.; John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism* (1890; rpr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1984); and Craig A. Sheppard, "A Theological Evaluation and Comparison of the Atonement and Justification in the Writings of James Henley Thornwell (1812–1862) and John Lafayette Girardeau (1825–1898)" (PhD dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2008).

20. The reason for this lacuna in his legacy is most likely due to his death at the early age of 49.

21. His writings were collated and edited for publication posthumously as *Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* by his colleague, John Bailey Adger, and his younger friend and prodigy, John L. Girardeau.

22. James Henley Thornwell, *Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, ed. John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau (1875; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 2:383.

God through our works. Thornwell goes to great lengths to demur this logic and he does it on the grounds of our union with Christ. We are able to be dutiful and loyal children because we have been blessed with every blessing necessary for holy living by our Savior who is not only our wisdom and justification, but also our *ἀγιασμός* (1 Cor 1:30). Here the definitive nature of our sanctification bleeds over into the progressive growth into holiness. We are sanctified (definitively); therefore, we are being sanctified (progressively). Thornwell cites Robert Bragge to make his point: “Our children, the day they are born, are as much our children as they are ever after, but they are many years growing up into a state of manhood; their likeness to us as it respects the mind as well as the body is daily increasing. Thus a king’s first-born son is heir-apparent to the crown while lying in the cradle; after-growth adds nothing to his title, but it does to his fitness to govern, and succeed his father. Our right to heaven comes not in at the door of our sanctification, but at that of our justification; but our meetness for heaven does. By Christ’s righteousness, it being upon us, we have a right to the inheritance, and by Christ’s image, it being drawn upon us, we have our meetness” (2:390). Of importance for our topic is the distinction he makes between “our right to heaven” and our “meetness for heaven.” Our right is through the Father’s declarative and forensic justification. Yet, we ever become more meet/fit/suitable for heaven by the process of sanctification. Heaven is a place of moral perfection for which we are being prepared by “Christ’s image . . . being drawn upon us.” Thus, Thornwell eschews the accusation of legalism that emits from the antinomian corner against those who believe our Savior’s words: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

“The Gospel, like its blessed Master, is always crucified between two thieves—legalists of all sorts on the one hand and Antinomians on the other; the former [legalists] robbing the Saviour of the glory of his work for us, and the other [antinomians] robbing him of the glory of his work *within* us” (2:385).

Thornwell has more to say concerning one’s pursuit of holiness in his essay on “Christian Effort.” The opening sentence of this article reads clearly: “The life of the Christian is not a life of inactivity and ease. He becomes the servant of God by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ, and is sent into his Master’s vineyard for the purpose of working for his Master’s glory” (2:397). Furthermore, he argues against the collapsing of sanctification into justification as is often common among antinomians and the undue exclusion of law and, therefore, effort from sanctification. “There can be no cordial acceptance of Christ

for righteousness without a cordial acceptance of Him for sanctification. He cannot be divided. No man can receive Him as a priest who does not at the same time receive Him as a king. The general idea of the Apostle, therefore, is that Christians should strive together for the purpose of promoting the success of the Gospel in themselves and others” (2:397). For Thornwell sanctification, and the role of human activity in doing all He has commanded us, involves right thinking about the person of Christ as well as the work of Christ. Christ Jesus is not only the priest who offered the perfect sacrifice for us, but also He is the King who demands our fealty. The benevolent King commands, and we do not only for His glory, but also for our growth into His glory. Our Savior learned obedience in His flesh (Heb 5:8). How much more are we to learn the same from and during our life, so that we may be fit for glory.

Is Christian effort toward holiness or obedience to God’s rule of life a burden for the believer? Thornwell answered clearly when he wrote: “Sanctification, progressive growth in grace, and the having his light shine brighter and brighter until the perfect day he knows is his privilege, secured to him in the Covenant of Grace, and he shows by his efforts and evinces by his life that he feels it to be a sweet, delightful, precious privilege. Such are the Christian’s views of his own heart, such his regard for the glory of God and the beauty of holiness, that he cannot intermit or relax his efforts so long as the deceitfulness of the one distresses or the loveliness of the other allures him” (2:398). The reader will hear in Thornwell an exposition of the Apostle John who said: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:1–3).

What is the manner in which a believer is sanctified? Is it by one’s efforts? Thornwell answers: “A healthy and vigorous Christian character can be formed only by feeding on the solid and substantial food of uncorrupted truth. Not by any means that the truth has any sanctifying power in itself. All its efficacy depends on the accompanying operations of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will accompany nothing but His own Word” (2:400). The antinomian tendency will focus on Thornwell’s denial that the word of God has any sanctifying efficacy. The antinomian tendency highlights the “operations of the Holy Spirit.” Yet, Thornwell would have nothing of this superficiality when he said: “the

Holy Spirit will accompany nothing but His own Word.” The manner in which a Christian is sanctified is by the agency of the Holy Spirit as He works in us to will and to do the holy and good pleasure of the Father and the Son (Phil 2:12, 13). And what is the holy and good pleasure of the Father and the Son? That which Jesus did for us and that was to keep the law.

Thornwell concludes his treatment of “Christian Effort” with words that properly summarize his view of our pursuit of holiness or sanctification. “May we all be found of Him in well-doing—faithful, laborious and devoted servants, such as the Lord will delight to honour!” (2:407). There is no place for a Christian to be passive or inactive. We must be at ease in pursuit of His holy standards by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

JOHN MURRAY: THE WESTMINSTER TRADITION

Students of early 20th century American Church History will be aware that Westminster was instituted in 1929 in response to the restructuring that took place at Princeton University. John Murray was a Scotsman on loan to the United States and the church. As a student of Warfield and Geerhardus Vos, Murray was J. Gresham Machen’s choice to perpetuate the biblical-confessional theology of his alma mater in the new seminary in Philadelphia. He taught biblical and systematic theology from 1937–66.

To explore sanctification, Murray began with the “definitive sanctification” of each redeemed image bearer. Definitive sanctification is a most important contribution to biblical theology and the life of believers. In Christ Jesus’s death and resurrection, those chosen in Him are united and so enjoy that which Christ accomplished. “We are compelled to reach the conclusion,” wrote Murray, “that it is by virtue of having died with Christ, and our being raised with him in his resurrection from the dead, that the decisive breach with sin in its power, control, and defilement has been wrought, and that the reason for this is that Christ in his death and resurrection broke the power of sin, triumphed over the god of this world . . . and by that victory delivered all those who were united to him from the power of darkness, and translated them into his own kingdom.”²³ The fruit of this definitive work is two-fold for Murray: 1) the fruit of holiness in this life; and 2) everlasting life (Murray, 2:289). For our purposes please note that foundational nature of definitive sanctification, which is accomplished for us in Christ death and resurrection and realized through our union and communion with Christ. Because believers are definitively

sanctified, they produce the fruit of holiness, which is the topic of progressive sanctification.

Murray reminds his readers that the agencies of the Son and Spirit are involved in our growth in grace or sanctification. This fact, however, should not allow one to assume a posture of quietude or passivity. Rather, “the assumption is that there is defilement of flesh and spirit [the believer being *simul justus et peccator*] and that we ourselves are to be actively engaged in cleansing ourselves from that defilement, just as on the more positive side we are to perfect holiness in the fear of God” (Murray 2:296). This process of sanctification, Murray explains “is exemplified particularly in knowledge and love” (Murray 2:299). Here the link between obedience and love for God is seen as vital to one’s pursuit of holiness/sanctification.

Having established the doctrine of progressive sanctification with the provision of Christ’s grace and the demands of holiness, Murray turned to “The Pattern of Sanctification.” He wrote: “Sanctification has respect to holiness. The Old Testament as well as the New lays stress upon this fact” (2:305). The reason sanctification has respect to holiness is because God is holy. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48). From this clear teaching of Scripture Murray moved to the question of how we pursue the pattern of holiness, which is God himself. His answer was unambiguous when he said: “The necessity of revelation defining the respects in which likeness to God prescribes the norm of sanctification, shows how consonant with the ultimate principle are the other considerations, that the law of God, the revealed will of God, and the example of our Lord are the criteria and patterns according to which sanctification proceeds. The law of God is the transcript of God’s perfection; it is God’s perfection coming to expressing for the regulation of thought and conduct consonant with his holiness” (2:306–07). So God’s law not only deals with the internal being (“regulation of thought”), but also with the external actions (“conduct”) of the believer.

Therefore, we see that sanctification relates to holiness. In fact, anyone familiar with the original languages or having been taught well from the pulpit knows that “sanctification,” “holiness,” and “set apart” are cognates from the same Greek word. Sanctification is the pursuit of holiness or uniqueness after the image of Christ. As the “transcript of God’s perfection,” the law of God is

23. John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:288.

the only proper norm or criteria for holiness or perfection. Christ Jesus, as the perfect law-keeper, is the exemplar of holiness and a sanctified life.

Listen again to Professor Murray: “But the means of grace by which this work of grace [*i.e.*, sanctification] is wrought are clearly indicated. The glory of Christ is portrayed and exhibited to us in the pages of Scripture. The Holy Spirit illumines our minds and quickens our hearts to behold the glory; he takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us. He thus glorifies Christ. The responses in us are adoration, love, obedience, and communion. His glory fills our minds, captivates our hearts, constrains our wills... This process of conformation to the image of Christ does not take place by quiescent passivity on our part. It is only by concentrated application of the data of revelation that we come into this encounter with the glory of the Lord. And all the energies of our being are enlisted in the exercise of adoration, love, obedience, and fellowship” (2:311–12).

Again, it is clear that sanctification involves our love for God the Father and the Son, but this love is not one of “quiescent passivity on our part,” but loving obedience to God’s revealed will, which is codified in the divine character revealing law.

One last point worthy of note as we leave Murray’s exposition on sanctification is the Trinitarian nature of the doctrine. The character of the eternal Father is exhibited in His revelation to man, especially in special revelation as inscripturated in the Bible. But His character was also displayed in the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, our perfect illustrator. The rule of life for the Christian requires the applicatory labors of the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of the living God. Thus, our sanctification is the result of the loving involvement of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No Trinity; no salvation, and, thus, no holiness.

To summarize, Professor Murray begins with the reality of definitive sanctification whereby the elect are united to Christ in His death and resurrection. Thus, the foundation for transformation into the image of Christ is established. This transformation is one of a progressive nature and not only requires the agencies of Christ Jesus and the Spirit, but the pattern of holiness which is set forth in the Scriptures and this particularly in His law, which is spiritual, holy, righteous, and good (Rom 7:12, 14). Activity is required of the believer for he is to put off that which is lawless and put on that which

is lawful. Progressive sanctification then involves our union with Christ, the Spirit’s actuating of grace in our lives to meet our responsibility and privilege of holiness. Quietude and passivity have no place as we rest upon Christ and enjoy our union with Him. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

CONCLUSION

It must be granted that wherever the use of the law and good works are promoted as means of sanctification critics will abound. This, however, must not dampen our efforts. Because of the existence of those aberrant schools which would distort the lawful use of God’s precepts and good works, the needy church demands that the American Reformed Tradition state the balanced, biblical teaching in a clear and uncompromising fashion.

It would behoove us to follow Turretin at this point. Though he recognizes that the Roman Church and those following Lutheran emphases on law-gospel have many negative things to say, he insists that the Reformed tradition must affirm that good works are necessary to salvation. He unapologetically declared this when he said: “still we think with others that it [*i.e.*, good works in relation to salvation, but particularly, sanctification] can be retained without danger if properly explained. We also hold that it should be pressed against the license of the Epicureans so that although works may be said to contribute nothing to the acquisition of salvation, still they should be considered necessary to the obtainment of it, so that no one can be saved without them—that thus our religion may be freed from those most foul calumnies everywhere cast most unjustly upon it by the Romaniists (as if it were the mistress of impiety and the cushion of carnal licentiousness and security).”²⁴

It is often said in the writings of American Reformed theologians that sanctification is primarily a heart issue, an internal affect on the soul; but not the soul alone, rather the whole man. They are just as prompt to say that there is no conflict between love and law-keeping. Perhaps this sentiment—there is no conflict between love and law-keeping—best sums up the relationship of the law and sanctification. Of course, when one is inwardly motivated to image God, as He has revealed Himself in the law, he will do what God says and the result is evangelical obedience or good works.

When the American Reformed theologians complete their expositions, conclude their exposés of the variant teachings, and express their positions, there certainly

Continued on Page 251.

24. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 2:703.

Editorial. Continued from Page 2.

never was a biblical and systematic theologian, he would have still been churchman. The bride of Christ was Murray's first passion, such that he would not have been able to conceive of the Christian life without or outside the church. As a churchman he served actively and faithfully performing committee work, including doing committee work for a General Assembly (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) committee on song in worship.

In a day when anything goes in worship Murray is once again a fresh breeze coming into a spiritually stale land. Murray's work on worship, especially his biblical-theological argument for exclusive Psalmody, has been helpful for his generation and ours. And while we are not all exclusive Psalmists here on the staff of *The Confessional Presbyterian*, we all recognize the glory and value of the Psalm-singing tradition within the history of Presbyterianism. For this reason alone, our taking up the debate in our *Sic et Non* section, as well as offering his piece on worship and the Psalms, is appropriate given Murray's good contribution to this on-going discussion. We also offer here several articles which in some way address the issue of Reformed churchmanship and worship.

Yes, Reformed churchmanship and worship are woefully waning traits of today's Reformed churches. Murray understood both exceedingly well. And he did not understand them so well despite his commitment to Reformed biblical and systematic theology, but precisely because of it. Reformed biblical and systematic theology on the one hand, and Reformed churchmanship and worship on the other, are for Murray the warp and woof of Presbyterianism. His legacy may not be explicitly expressed on every page of this issue, but it nevertheless informs the issue as a whole. And for that reason the editors commend to you the following articles for the advancement of that kind of Presbyterianism to the glory of God and in service to His church.

THE EDITORS ■

Sanctification, the Law, and Good Works. Continued from Page 28.

appears to be, within the corpus of American Reformed writings, an agreement on what sanctification is and is not. Sanctification, in the greater scheme of redemption, is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, sanctification does involve the activity of believers. Regenerate persons, motivated by the renewed disposition and energized by the Holy Spirit, are guided by the law to do good works which God ordained for their earthly conduct (Eph 2:10).²⁵ The good works serve as reminders and encouragements that the Holy Spirit is active in transforming the regenerate soul into the image of Christ. As good works

encourage the heart, one can see that the law is a trustworthy guide and hedge from sin (Ps 119:11). The law really does militate against sin. The demands of the law constantly remind believers of their total dependence on the sanctifying Spirit of Christ (1 Cor 1:30,31; 2 Cor 3:17,18) and the need to judge all labors by God's holy standard rather than the world's.

The relationship between sanctification, the law, and good works is a close one in the theology of the American Reformed Tradition. Although it is often frowned upon to introduce new material into a conclusion, it may be helpful for the reader to be reminded that the representatives we have surveyed all practiced covenant theology and believed it best exemplified the teaching of Scripture. With this conviction came the biblical consciousness that a covenant "consists of two parts: on the one hand the promise on the part of God; on the other the stipulation of obedience on the part of man. For as God promises in it to be our God, he wishes that we also in turn should be his people" (Turretin 2:703).

Furthermore, the fact that the Christian life is exemplified by struggle, necessitates the inclusion of the law and good works.²⁶ The struggle is against sin and sin is lawlessness. Law then must be involved so that one may properly identify one's sin and turn in repentance to follow the proper course, the course that imitates the Savior, the good works set forth in the law.

There is a consensus among American Reformers when one comes to the doctrine of sanctification—the law and good works are essential elements of the doctrine. This consensus is built on the fact that Christ became for us sanctification. In the life of Christ the law and exemplary works were accomplished by Christ for the elect. The Spirit uses these same means to apply and fulfill the sanctification that Christ obtained for us. And so "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4).

An Exposition of Psalm 68. Continued from Page 40.

VERSES 32–36

God has finally achieved the full victory, and the kingdoms of the earth rejoice. The one who rode through the desert from Egypt now rides in the heavens. He speaks, and the universe

25. Donald McKim, "William Perkins and the Christian Life: The Place of the Moral Law and Sanctification in Perkins' Theology," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 59 (April 1987):129.

26. The Christian life as "struggle" is certainly evident in Calvin's exposition on the Christian life (*Institutes* 3.6–10). Also, see Gerstner's discussion of this emphasis in Edwards' theology (works cited above 3:230–43).