

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Email: [Jrob1517@aol.com](mailto:Jrob1517@aol.com)

Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

## The Relationship between Justification and Sanctification

Edited by John W. Robbins

Sanctification is what God does in the believer; it is not the good works of the believer. Important as they are, neither sanctification nor good works is the basis of salvation or the foundation of the Christian's hope. Sanctification, of course, is a work of God's grace, but it is the result of a more fundamental act of grace. Unless sanctification is rooted in justification, and justification in election, sanctification cannot escape the poisons of subjectivism, moralism, or Pharisaism.

Sinful reasoning might tell us that what God does in changing the heart of the sinner is the most important thing God could possibly do in the salvation process. This contention is the heart of Roman Catholic soteriology, and it must be admitted that the overwhelming preoccupation of neo-evangelicalism today is its message of being saved by "letting Christ come into your heart," by being born again, etc. It is neo-evangelical Romanism. The great truth of justification by faith alone, however, does not deal with the acts of God *within* the believer, but with the saving acts of God *outside* the believer.

First, the reason for a man's acceptance with God unto life eternal is sheer grace: "being justified freely by his grace" (*Romans 3:24*). The Greek word here translated *freely* is elsewhere translated *without cause*. God's grace is not conditioned on

any quality in the human heart or life. So far is it from relating to a quality within man that the apostle declares that this "grace . . . was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (*2 Timothy 1:9*). Grace is a quality in God's heart, his disposition to be kind and merciful to those who are lost and undeserving. Grace means God's attribute of accepting those who are unacceptable—including those whom he has sanctified.

Yet God cannot allow his grace to override his justice. The rule of law must be upheld. God must have valid grounds to forgive sinners and to accept them as righteous. Those grounds are also completely outside of us: "being justified freely by his grace *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (*Romans 3:24*).

Christ's living and dying are the sole grounds of God's being able to judge us and treat us as righteous. This is being "justified by Christ" (*Galatians 2:1*). The Gospel proclaims that sinners are saved by the objective, concrete acts of God in history. This is an action that is so far outside the sinner that it happened two thousand years ago. This is Christianity. It is the only truly historical religion. All other religions teach that salvation is found in some process within the worshiper, and consequently the worshiper's supreme preoccupation is with his internal experience.

Christianity alone proclaims a salvation which is found in an event outside the believer.

This truth, of course, is a great offense to human pride. Consider the children of Israel in the wilderness. Many were bitten by serpents and were facing certain death. Moses put a likeness of a deadly serpent on a pole and invited the dying to look and live. Whoever had heard of such a thing as this? The poison was inside, and how could something completely outside bring them any help? To us who are poisoned to death by that old serpent the devil, Jesus declares: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (*John* 3:14).

The basis of salvation is not a subjective process. If the way of salvation were simply a matter of inviting Christ into the heart or being born again by the Spirit, then Christ need not have come here to suffer and die. But no amount of sanctification or inward holiness can bridge the gulf that sin has made and put us into right relationship with God. Fellowship with God cannot rest on an internal process of being made holy. Perfection is not something that God requires at the end of the process. He demands perfection and absolute holiness before any right relationship can begin.

Salvation and right standing with God rest on what God has already done outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ (*Romans* 3:24). Two thousand years ago there was an objective historical event. God himself broke into human history in the person of his Son. He became our representative Man. He bore our nature and became so identified with us that all that he did was not only for his people, but also was legally as if we had done it. He strove with sin, the devil, and death. He utterly defeated them and destroyed their power. His victory was for us. It was really and legally *our* victory. When he lived that holy life, which satisfied the claims of God's law, it was for us. It was as if we had lived it. When he bore the punishment for sin, justice saw us punished in him. "If one died for all, then are all dead" (*2 Corinthians* 5:14). When he arose and was accepted with joy into the presence of God, honored and exalted to God's right hand, all that was for us. It was his people that God embraced in the person

of his Son. As certainly as God came to this Earth in the person of Christ, just so certainly have we gone to Heaven in the person of Christ. The Gospel does not proclaim the good things that God will do in his people, but it proclaims the good things that he has done for his people. By his glorious acts outside of us, he has actually accomplished our salvation. He has forgiven, justified, and restored us to glory and honor in the person of Jesus Christ (*Ephesians* 1:3-7; 2:4-6; *Romans* 4:25; 5:8-10, 18, 19; *Colossians* 2:10).

Justification is not only *by grace alone* and *by Christ alone*; it must also be *by belief alone*. That which God has done outside of us in his Son must be believed. Faith comes by hearing this message of Christ (*Romans* 10:17). Faith does not bring salvation into existence. It does not produce the righteousness by which God justifies us. Faith does not *make*; it *takes*. It is assenting to an arrangement already made by God. The object of faith is completely objective. It is not faith in what the Holy Spirit has done within us. It is not faith in our sanctification or in some past experience of being born again. It is not faith in our faith. It is not faith in the church. It is not faith in baptism. Faith is focused on what is in Heaven, on what we have in Christ at God's right hand (*Colossians* 3:1-4). Therefore, we must decisively say that sanctification, being on Earth, being in the believer, is no part of the righteousness that is by faith alone. The righteousness that is of faith alone is the righteousness of the living and dying of Christ. It is that life of perfect holiness that Christ now presents at the bar of justice on our behalf. The only righteousness we have before God is the righteousness that is now actually before God. Our righteousness, therefore, is where we need it most—in God's presence, before God's law, at the Father's right hand. For our righteousness is Christ himself (*Jeremiah* 23:6). As John Bunyan declared, the sublime secret of the Bible is "that a righteousness that resides with a person in Heaven should justify me, a sinner on Earth." This is righteousness by faith. It is a righteousness which the Reformers declared to be "an alien righteousness"—a righteousness completely outside of man and so foreign to sinful reasoning that it can be known only by the Gospel.

We have seen that God justifies by grace, on the grounds of Christ's work, and applies the blessing to the sinner who receives it in faith. The grace that justifies is outside of the believing sinner. The righteousness that justifies is outside of the believing sinner. The faith that accepts the blessing is affixed to that which is outside of the believing sinner. God's act of justifying the believing sinner is also outside the believer. This may be seen in two different ways.

### *The Meaning of Justification*

*Justification* is a legal word having reference to trial and judgment. It does not mean to make a person subjectively righteous any more than *condemnation* means to make a person subjectively wicked. Justification is simply a verdict of the court *declaring* or *pronouncing* a person to be righteous. In the case of God's verdict, he declares the believing sinner to be righteous because the sinner's Representative is righteous. Or to put it another way, when the sinner claims the righteousness of Christ as his own and presents it before God, the Judge acknowledges that the debt has been paid, and the sinner is set right before the law. It is not a mere pardon, a declaration of "not guilty." It is an imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ himself.

Justification, therefore, is not an act of God within the sinner, but it is an act of God outside the sinner. It is God's verdict upon him. It is a forensic, declaratory act. It is not based on the holiness of the one who believes, but on the holiness of him in whom the sinner believes. This point is crucial. In this matter of our acceptance with God, we are not to be anxious about what God thinks of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute. If we confuse justification with the internal sanctification process, faith totters, and we find it impossible to stand before God with a pacified conscience. Justification pertains to what God does *for us*, not what he does *in us*.

### *The Method of Justification*

In *Romans* 4 the apostle not only declares that God justifies the ungodly (verse 5), but that God does

this by *imputing* righteousness to the one who believes (verses 3, 5-7). In chapter 5 Paul shows that the righteousness that God imputes is "the righteousness of one" (verses 18, 19). Now the word *impute* does not mean *to infuse*. It simply means *to attribute to* the sinner that which he does not possess in himself. Imputation does not change the object, but it changes the way the object is regarded. It changes the legal status of the object. The supreme illustration of this is Calvary. Our sins were imputed to Christ (*2 Corinthians* 5:19-21). This did not subjectively make him a sinner, but it did change the way God regarded him. It had a decisive bearing on the way justice treated him.

God's act of justification depends on perfect righteousness, of course. Yet it does not depend on this righteousness being in us, but on it being interceded for us in God's presence. God reckons it to us simply because Christ performed it for us and we accept it in faith. Therefore, whichever way we look at it and whichever way we turn it, *justification* is an act of God's grace that is wholly outside the experience of the one who believes.

We are aware of those objections, hoary with age, which rush in, crying derisively, "Legal fiction!" "Divine make-believe!" "Celestial bookkeeping!" "As-if, pasted-on righteousness!" etc. We will answer these objections by considering the inseparable relationship between justification and sanctification. Indeed, it is our purpose to show how justification is the only thing that can lead to sanctification. The kind of justification we have considered is the dynamic cause of sanctification. The doctrine of imputed righteousness undergirds all ethical action as well.

### *The Legal Connections between Justification and Sanctification*

Let us not be afraid to think in legal categories, for the whole of the Scriptures moves in this atmosphere. God is Judge and Lawgiver. He is the God of law and order. Unlike the unpredictable gods of the heathen, we can depend on him to act in harmony with his own law of eternal rectitude. *Justification*, that great Pauline word, is a word of

the law court. God is not only in the business of saving sinners, but in the business of vindicating his law. Paul argues that our salvation is grounded in law and justice as much as in grace and mercy (see *Romans* 3:24-26). Our own consciences demand justice and cannot be pacified unless God's fellowship with us is grounded on justice. God was not playacting at Calvary. Calvary was not a legal fiction. It proves that the moral law is inexorable. Calvary gives us a legal (lawful) basis of salvation.

We accept the legal principle in the most important human relationships. A woman who ignores a legal relationship ("mere paper") and tries to establish a relationship with a man by experience alone is prostituting a fundamental law of life. A person who takes property without a deed ("mere paper") is a thief. In Revelation, Babylon is called a harlot (*Revelation* 17:5). Babylon is every system that tries to establish a relationship with God on the basis of experience. Sanctification is living a life of fellowship with God. Justification is its legal basis, and without justification no fellowship with a holy God can exist. Fellowship with God demands perfect righteousness at the very beginning.

*a. In the Matter of Sin.* It has often been said that justification is deliverance from the guilt of sin, while sanctification is deliverance from the power of sin. But we must not split them up so that we would conceive of a man enjoying one blessing without the other. This often happens in "holiness" theology where it is postulated that there are two types of Christians—the elect, who are delivered from the guilt of sin, and the very elect, who are also delivered from the power of sin; or those who only know Christ as Savior and those who also know Christ as Lord. The Bible knows nothing of this kind of separation between justification and sanctification. It is thoroughly mischievous in its results. If it does not lead to spiritual pride among those who imagine that they are out of *Romans* 7 into *Romans* 8, it leads to the Christ-denying notion that a man can be saved from the guilt of sin and yet continue to wallow in its pollution—as if sanctification were not the necessary consequence of justification.

There is a direct relationship between the guilt of sin and the power of sin. If the guilt of sin is removed, the power of sin is broken. This is Paul's point in *Romans* 6:14: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace." That is to say, as long as a man is "under the law," sin will be king over him, and he will be forced to surrender to its reign. But if he comes under grace, sin has no more power to rule and tyrannize. In *Romans* 7 Paul goes on to explain the relationship between the law and sin's power. The strength of sin is not in sin itself, for "the strength of sin is the law" (*I Corinthians* 15:56). The law—yes, the holy, just, and good law of God—binds a man to the service of sin by the power of omnipotent justice. Sin is the master ("the husband") that men chose to serve, and the law binds them in this relationship just like a woman is bound by the law to the husband of her choice. As the law keeps the criminal in jail, so it is God's law that binds the sinner to the miserable service of sin. In fact, "sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (*Romans* 7:8).

Freedom from the power of sin is found only in coming to terms with the law of God. As long as we are in debt to its righteous demands, we are "under the law" and will surely be kept in the prison house of sin. But as soon as faith accepts Christ's living and dying as ours, we are justified, or set right before the law. When by faith in Christ we stand before the law as forgiven and righteous, the law no longer binds us to that old master. Sin has no more power to hold us. Justification makes us legally free not to serve sin. Deliverance from sin's power is therefore the inevitable result of deliverance from sin's guilt.

*b. In the Matter of Holiness.* It has often been said (and truly) that justification is our title to Heaven. We must not forget, however, that the life of Heaven begins in the life of holiness here and now. Sanctification is glorification begun. It is the life of Heaven in the seed, the first fruits, or down payment, of the immortal inheritance (*Romans* 8:23; *Ephesians* 1:14). Heaven is God's presence. It is to partake of his holiness and to participate in his life. But this participation in the holiness of God begins

here with those who "have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come" (Hebrews 6:4, 5).

In the Fall man lost all those legal rights and privileges. A sinner has no right or title to participate in God's life of holiness. Yet Christ, and Christ alone, has won for his people this right of access: "as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become sons of God [to be partakers of his divine nature—2 *Peter* 1:4], even to them that believe on his name" (*John* 1:12). Faith alone justifies, and being justified, we have legal access (rights and titles) to enter the way of holiness. Along this route to "the celestial city" many trials lie in wait to purify our faith and life. There are giants to beat us, nets to catch us, and crafty men to beguile us. And along the King's highway travel such saints as "Ready to Halt," "Little Faith" and poor "Christian," who runs afoul of trouble times without number. In such times of temptation and weakness, how could we assure our hearts before God unless we could look to our title found in the righteousness of the One who represents us at God's right hand? How easily faith would falter and we would stand disarmed in the midst of our enemies if, being challenged for our right to be traveling the road of sanctification, we put our hand (like "Ignorance") into our own bosom to find some grounds to be among the saints. Happy is the man who, in the hour of test and trial, can look outside himself to Christ, instead of inside to self. Thus, justification is the legal basis of sanctification. It makes holiness possible by removing sin's lawful right to rule us and by establishing our lawful right to walk in the way of holiness.

### *The Psychological Connection between Justification and Sanctification*

Justification and sanctification are psychologically related. A life of sanctification (fellowship with God) is not possible unless we are first persuaded that we are acceptable and pleasing to God. This persuasion cannot be founded on our past, present, or future performance. God wants us first to know

that he is fully satisfied with Jesus. He has found him righteous, and with him he is well pleased. That God is pleased in Jesus is demonstrated by his resurrection from the dead. What is that to us? Christ is our Representative. He bears our humanity in the presence of God, and God wants us to know that he accepts us in the person of his Son. In this matter of acceptance, therefore, it is sufficient for us to know that God accepts Jesus. It is this faith which enables us to serve God freely, gladly, and out of spontaneous love.

If a believer tries to live the Christian life either to secure or to consolidate his acceptance with God, immediately the springs of free, grateful, and spontaneous obedience are dried up. God is more interested in the motive of service than the actual performance. We should remember the teaching of Jesus that he who is forgiven much (justification), the same loves much (sanctification) (see *Luke* 7:40-47). He who hears the word of justification ("Neither do I condemn you") is the only one psychologically ready to obey the command of sanctification ("go and sin no more") (see *John* 8:3-11). Says W. G. T. Shedd:

The strongest inducement for a Christian to obey the divine law is the fact that he has been graciously pardoned for having broken the law. He follows after sanctification because he has received justification. He obeys the law, not in order to be forgiven, but because he has been forgiven. 2 *Corinthians* 5:4: "The love of Christ constrains us not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us." And the love meant is Christ's redeeming love. 2 *Corinthians* 7:1: "Having these promises [of forgiveness], let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." Because God has blotted out all his past sin, the believer has the most encouraging of all motives to resist all future sin. Had God not pardoned the past, it would be futile to struggle in the future.

Justification frees the soul for true Christian service. W. H. Griffith-Thomas puts this well:

It is also the secret of true spiritual service. The soul released from anxiety about itself, is free to exercise concern about others. The heart is at leisure from itself to set forward the salvation of those around.

the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (*Galatians* 3:1, 2, 10-14).

## *The Causal Connection between Justification and Sanctification*

The Holy Spirit is the efficient agent of sanctification. God the Father and God the Son send him into the hearts of his people in order that they might be sanctified. How then can our sanctified obedience be the condition of receiving the Holy Spirit? Yet on every hand we read books and listen to sermons telling us how we may receive the Holy Spirit by "five steps," "seven steps," "absolute surrender," and other amazing feats of human endeavor. Some even teach that the outpouring of God's Spirit will take place when God's people are fully sanctified. But if we could do these things in order to get the Holy Spirit, what would we need the Spirit for?

What is the testimony of God's Word? Simply that Christ, by his perfect righteousness, has won for us the gift of God's Spirit. The Spirit has been given to this one Man (*Acts* 2:32, 33), and all who receive this one Man are forgiven and receive the Holy Spirit without measure (*Acts* 10:43, 44; *John* 7:38, 39).

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? . . . For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: For it is written, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "The just shall live by faith." And the law is not of faith; but "The man that does them shall live in them." Christ has redeemed us from

The way of justification by faith alone is the only way of receiving the Spirit of God. To be justified means to be declared righteous. It means that God not only regards us as righteous, but also can proceed to treat us as righteous. How does he treat the forgiven sinner as righteous? By giving him the gift of the Holy Spirit. Nothing more and nothing less than perfect righteousness is necessary for the outpouring of God's Spirit. As every believer has this perfect righteousness *imputed* to him, he may on this one infallible basis have the Holy Spirit *imparted* to him.

When the doctrine of justification by faith alone is allowed to languish, there is no Holy Spirit and, of course, no true sanctification—even though people spend all their time talking about getting ready for the outpouring of God's Spirit. When justification by faith alone is proclaimed, the Spirit breathes new life into the church, and God's people run the way of sanctification with great joy and zeal. These two gifts belong together—"the gift of righteousness" (*Romans* 5:17), which is imputed, and the gift of the Spirit, which is imparted ("shed abroad in our hearts") (see *Romans* 5:1, 5). We must distinguish these two blessings in thought so that we may know where to rest our hope of salvation. But to separate justification and the gift of the Holy Spirit in time is a great mischief. It divides the Trinity and divides the church.

## *Justification, Sanctification, and Faith*

Justification and sanctification are benefits that Christ won for his people by his life, death, and resurrection. Yet we cannot secure an interest in these benefits, we cannot share in them, unless we assent to them. We are justified by the truth of the Gospel. As Luther said, "He who believes shall

possess all things, and he who believes not shall possess nothing." Upon being united to Christ by faith, we are justified, for "if the root be holy, so are the branches" (*Romans* 11:16). And if we are "in Christ," joined to Christ as the branch is united to the vine, it is inevitable that we will be "partakers of his holiness." Union with Christ through belief therefore secures the two benefits. The legal benefit is justification, and the moral benefit is sanctification. It is impossible to secure one without the other. As Calvin wrote:

Christ cannot be torn into parts, so these two which we perceive in him together and conjointly are inseparable—namely, righteousness and sanctification. Whomever, therefore, God receives into grace, on them he at the same time bestows the spirit of adoption [*Romans* 8:15], by whose power he remakes them to his own image. . . . Yet Scripture, even though it joins them, still lists them separately in order that God's manifold grace may better appear to us.

Why, then, are we justified by faith alone? Because by faith we understand and accept Christ's righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he is "given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption" (*1 Corinthians* 1:30). Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illuminates by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies.

### *Some Practical Examples of How Justification Is the Mainspring of Sanctification*

When Christ directed the woman taken in adultery, "go, and sin no more," he was commanding her to live a life of holiness and purity. But this new life of sanctification was only possible as she first grasped

the hope of justification that was given her in the promise of Christ, "Neither do I condemn thee" (*John* 8:11). The liberating decree of "no condemnation" (*Romans* 8:1) sets the soul free to run the way of God's commandments. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul exhorts them, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the Earth" (*Colossians* 3:5). The apostle has just finished telling the Colossians, "For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

This illustrates the Biblical relationship between the *indicative* (you *are*) and the *imperative* (you *ought*). First the believers are reminded that they *are* dead to sin. (Through faith they have been united to Christ. God considers that when Christ died, they died.) Then they are told, "Put to death your members which are upon the Earth." As if to say, "God counts you as dead men, for that is what you really are in Christ. Now this gives you the right and responsibility to act like men who are dead to sin." We are not commanded to put to death our sinful desires *in order to* become dead, but *because we are already dead*. *Being* is not the result of *doing*, but *doing* is the result of *being*.

Further on Paul adds to the Colossians, "Lie not one to another, seeing that you *have* put off the old man with his deeds" (*Colossians* 3:9). Every human religion reverses that order. The best it can tell us is to stop lying and thereby put away the old man and his deeds. But the way of the Gospel is utterly contrary to human devisings. It says, You are already dead; now act like dead men. You are pure; now act like you are pure. You are perfect; now act like you are perfect. You already *are*; therefore act that way. The New Testament doctrine of sanctification is to get us to realize our legal position and standing, and to act accordingly.

Here is another example of how the Biblical command to live in holiness is undergirded by justification: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (*2 Corinthians* 7:1). This illustrates how we must grasp the promise of justification before we can obey the command of sanctification. We cannot "cleanse ourselves from

all filthiness" unless we believe that we are already washed in the blood of the Lamb (*1 John* 1:9). We cannot engage in the process of perfecting holiness unless we realize that "by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified" (*Hebrews* 10:14).

Consider this apostolic command: "speak evil of no man" (*Titus* 3:2). Is there any commandment of God's Word that we so easily transgress? Who can endure this straight edge of the law? For we are not only commanded to refrain from speaking evil of good men, but we are forbidden to speak evil of any man. And what a blessed, innocent, and holy congregation a pastor would have if the members carried this out. Yet if the pastor merely exhorts his congregation to live this sort of life, it is only an exercise in moralism or legalism. Obedience to this imperative is possible only as the congregation is reminded and keeps grasping the message of justification by faith alone. When Paul says, "speak evil of no man," he adds:

For [for this reason, in view of this] we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (*Titus* 3:3-7).

The publican who in the parable of Christ went down to his house justified had prayed, "God, be merciful to me, *the sinner!*" (*Luke* 18:13). This man was blessed because he was really poor in spirit (*Matthew* 5:3). He saw himself not only as *a sinner*, but also as *the sinner*. He felt that no one could be a sinner like him. He stood before God as if he were all the world's sin. This is the man whom God counts righteous. Now when a congregation grasps this kind of justification before God, how can they

speak evil of any man? Whether Paul is appealing for humility (as in *Philippians* 2), a forgiving spirit (as in *Ephesians* 4) or dedicated service (as in *Romans* 12), he always does so on the basis of the Gospel. Christian existence is Gospel existence. Sanctification is a consequence of justification. Good works are a consequence of sanctification.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of how justification and sanctification undergird all ethical action is found in the Old Testament—right in God's own preface to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God, who has brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. [Therefore] you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not. . . . You shall not . . . . You shall not . . . ." etc. (*Exodus* 20:2-17). God's redemptive acts back in Egypt (which are an illustration of his liberating acts in Christ and justification by faith alone) made the new life of obedience a right as well as a responsibility for the redeemed people. Appeals to live the good life that are not based on the truth of justification by faith alone can only lead to moralism and legalism. But justification makes the yoke of sanctification easy and the burden of holiness light.

### *The Need for a Constant Return to Justification*

Since the life of holiness is fueled and fired by justification by faith alone, sanctification must *constantly* return to justification. Otherwise, the Christian cannot possibly escape arriving at a new self-righteousness. We cannot reach a point in sanctification where our fellowship with God does not rest completely on forgiveness of sins.

This is why Luther called justification the article of the standing or falling church. He confessed that his whole soul and ministry were saturated with the truth of justification. This is why he bitterly complained against the "evangelical" radicals who regarded sanctification, or the "new life in the Spirit," as the higher stage in the soteriological process. The man who thinks he can get beyond grace and justification by faith alone falls from grace (*Galatians* 5:4).



In fact, one major aspect of sanctification is a growing appreciation of our need of God's justification through Jesus Christ. Growing toward Christian maturity does not mean being weaned from our dependence on imputed righteousness. The man who is strong in faith is strong in the doctrines of grace. He becomes more and more overwhelmed and bowed down with the sense of God's mercy and increasingly attached to justification by the merits of Christ alone. If in our zeal for sanctification we fail to keep the pre-eminence of justification before us, we will get lost in a minute concern with our inner life and behavior. Our only safety is a constant return to the objective truth of salvation by the outside-of-me righteousness of Christ.

Therefore, we must affirm that the essence of sanctification is knowledge and remembrance. Sanctification is remembering what God has done and what has been given to us. It is amazing how often this point is emphasized both in the Old and New Testament. Israel's ethical action was to be constantly undergirded and inspired by her remembrance of what had happened and what had been given to her (see *Deuteronomy* 5:15). As long as Israel remembered God's redemptive acts in the beginning of her history, she would persevere in the way of holiness. If she forgot what had happened and lost sight of what was given her, she was sure to swerve from the way of holiness. Sanctification is remembering God's grace.

Our fathers understood not your wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of your mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known. He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: There was not one of them left. Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works;

they waited not for his counsel. . . . They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea. . . . Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his Word. . . (*Psalms* 106:7-13, 21, 22, 24).

When the prophets exhorted Israel to put away her sins and to live in holy obedience, they based their appeals to ethical conduct on the fact that God had delivered Israel from Egypt. Israel's future depended upon *remembering* her past.

The New Testament church is also founded on a concrete, historical act of deliverance. The deliverance from Egypt serves as a type of God's real act of salvation from sin in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ has died and has risen again, and by faith the church has become a participant, or sharer, in all that Christ has done. By the work of Jesus Christ on her behalf, she is freed from sin and justified in the sight of God. Yet she must *remember* what has happened and what has been given to her. As Christ himself broke the bread and divided the cup, he said, "this do in *remembrance* of me" (*1 Corinthians* 11:24). God's people have nothing to fear for the future unless they forget what has happened in the past.

The triumph of Christ is complete, irreversible, immutable. This is where Paul rests his case in his triumphant *Romans* 8 passage. He entertains no fears for "things present, nor things to come" (verse 38), because he remembers what has happened in the past (verse 34). And when he had occasion to exhort the immature Christian communities whom he found lapsing into such "fleshly" things as quarreling, lying, or sloth, he saluted them as saints (*1 Corinthians* 1:2). With words fresh from glory, he took them by the ears and reminded them what had happened in the Gospel and that by faith they were sharers in all that Christ had done and suffered. Yes, he told these faulty, fumbling, stumbling believers that they were dead (*Colossians* 3:3; *Romans* 6:6), risen (*Ephesians* 2:1-6) and free (*Romans* 7:4). Having shown them what they were, he showed how their un-Christlike behavior was inconsistent with their privileged position. The

factions Corinthians had to be reminded of the Gospel. The apostle wrote to them: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; by which also you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain" (*I Corinthians* 15:1, 2).

The epistles of Paul were written to encourage spiritual growth (sanctification) in people who were already believers. This point is very significant. Yet how did the apostle go about to promote such growth in grace? Every epistle was a mighty call to *remember* the Gospel and how believers are justified through faith alone in God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ. Every Pauline epistle, therefore, is an immutable testimony that the church can make progress in sanctification only in proportion to its grasp of justification. Each epistle is a call to *remember*. The church, even in Heaven, where the worship of the Lamb is central, is never led away from the first blessing to look for a "second blessing." Christ earned all the benefits of salvation for his people, and the first and greatest of these is justification.

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