

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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The Ground of Justification

Edited by John W. Robbins

It is not sufficient to speak of justification as God's declaring the sinner just. In fact, to stop there would be to fall into very serious error. We need to ask: On what ground can a holy God make this declaration about a sinful man? What is the basis of God's acquittal?

Those Who Deny the Necessity of the Ground of Justification

Some assert that since God is Almighty, he does not need any "ground" to forgive sin. In fact, they argue, to insist upon such a ground is to dishonor God. Such an insistence casts reflections upon God's omnipotence. God is quite capable of forgiving sin and restoring the sinner without having recourse to any ground. In this particular emphasis forgiveness is seen as that which comes from the Sovereign. Justification, in their view, is mere pardon. Justification is not at all related to justice; it is the act of sovereign power. Of course, the Biblical evidence for the omnipotence of God is well nigh endless. Ironically, many people who hold this view of justification do not believe what the Bible says about the omnipotence and sovereignty of God.

Others say, God is all loving, and therefore to insist upon any such ground on the basis of which God must forgive sin is to deny that love. The only ground, so to speak, is the love of God's heart. All expressions such as "redemption by ransom,"

"substitution," "satisfaction," "propitiation," and "expiation" are unworthy of God. In this view the cross is not seen as the propitiation of God's wrath, but rather as the unsurpassable demonstration of the love of God. Christ suffers with and in the sins of his people but not for their sins. He does not pay the penalty those sins deserve. This view has been advocated by ancient teachers in the church (Origen and Abelard) and by more modern ones (Bushnell in America; Robertson, Maurice, Campbell and Young in Great Britain; Schleiermacher and Ritschl in Germany). These theologians say that the demonstration of God's love at the cross affects not God but man. This love acts upon man and brings forth love from men's heart. Rather than the death of Christ removing any obstacle in the path of the sinner's reconciliation with God, that death, it is said, demonstrates to the sinner that there is no obstacle at all between himself and God. This view of the atonement has been aptly called the "magnet view." The crucifixion acts as a great magnet to bring men and women to repentance, and God is said to accept them on that basis (that is, their repentance) alone.

The third attribute within God that is called upon to deny the necessity for any ground of justification is, interestingly enough, the justice of God. For God to require a "satisfaction," it is said, would involve him in blatant injustice. Christ is innocent, and for God to punish an innocent Christ in the place of guilty sinners is less than just. In fact, it is downright unjust! Such a concept is cruel and

vindictive and smacks of a God who cares more about his precious holiness and law than about human beings. This is an "immoral" view of God.

So, to deny the necessity of any ground upon which God justifies the sinner, men appeal to something within God himself: (a) his omnipotence; (b) his great love; or (c) his infinite sense of fairness. None of these views is correct. All of these views contradict the Bible. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul declares that "the righteousness of God" is the ground on which a sinner is declared righteous in the sight of God.

Those Who Concede the Necessity of a Ground but Give Unsatisfactory Views of It

In addition to appealing to the attributes of God to deny the necessity of the ground of justification, some people also make an appeal to man. They understand "the righteousness of God" as an inward righteousness in man.

However, referring the righteousness of God to something within man is mistaken. *2 Corinthians* 5:21 is decisive against that view. Paul means us to understand that the believer is made the righteousness of God in the same way as Christ is made sin. It is out of the question to say that Christ was made sin by an impartation of sin into his being, and so it is out of the question to speak of the believer being made the righteousness of God by infusion, or impartation, or by conferral. Though sin was *on* Christ, it was not *in* Christ. Likewise, though the righteousness of God is *on* the believer, it is not *in* the believer. As the sin condemning the elect was outside of Christ, so the justifying righteousness of God is outside of the believer.

Then there have been those who see *faith itself* as what is meant by "the righteousness of God." Though there are different modifications of this view, none of them sees the justifying righteousness of God as something that is outside of man. The mind is not thrown onto Christ for its foundation but rather back onto itself. Much modern preaching on faith reflects this particular view. These people

undermine justification by making faith the ground, rather than the mere means or instrument, of justification. When faith is seen as the ground on which God justifies the sinner, faith is made into a new law. When this new law is fulfilled (that is, when a person believes), God is pleased, and because of the sinner's faith justifies him. Such a view of faith (as a "work," an "evangelical work") is in flat contradiction to the clear teaching of the Scriptures that we are justified neither by a work done by us nor a work done in us but solely because of the work of another—namely, Christ. His work was done *outside of us* and *for us*.

Those who elevate faith to the ground of justification represent God as accepting an imperfect title for a perfect one. In this view God accommodates his standards to the capability of the sinner. He lowers his standards. If this were the case, what would stop God from waiving his requirements altogether? It is obvious that God would require very little of men if faith were the ground of their acceptance. It is not so obvious why he could not waive his requirements altogether. But God has not lowered his standard for entering Heaven. The entrance requirement is, and has always been, and will always be, sinless perfection. God does not accept faith as a substitute for perfection.

The True Ground of Justification: The Righteousness of God

The ground of justification is called "the righteousness of God" because God in his great love and mercy initiated and authored it.

"The righteousness of God" is the work of the God-man, Jesus Christ. The Mediator between God and man cannot be God only or man only (*Galatians* 3:20). The Mediator represents two parties between whom he intervenes. Hence, the Mediator must be related to both and the equal of either (*1 Samuel* 2:25; *Job* 9:33; *Hebrews* 10:5). The Mediator must be both God and man. Because the righteousness of God is the work of the God-man, such righteousness is also literally perfect, infinitely valuable, and eternally valid. It is also a completely

voluntary righteousness, capable of being given away!

The righteousness of God has, as its standard, the divine attribute of righteousness mirrored in the law of God. The divine character is seen chiefly in two respects: (1) It is seen in the *demand* for satisfaction. Jesus Christ in the flesh, maintaining the law of God, is the declaration of the just God, who is true to himself. (2) The divine character is also seen in the *provision* of the satisfaction. Jesus Christ in the flesh, fulfilling the law of God, is the declaration of the infinite love of the just God seeking the salvation of his people. Jesus Christ is the declaration of both the justice and mercy of God. He both upheld and fulfilled the law of God. He neither denied nor disobeyed the law of God.

The law makes a twofold claim upon men: (1) sinless obedience as the only way to life (*Galatians* 3:12); (2) a curse incurred by those who violate it (*Galatians* 3:10-13). The God-man, Jesus Christ, was made under the law—voluntarily made under the law—that he might meet the demands of the law in both respects *on our behalf*. The living and dying of the Son of God was a living and dying not for himself but for all who believe. Through the instrument of faith, by which a sinner consents to the divine provision of the required righteousness, God reckons Christ's living and dying to the account of the sinner. This living and dying is the righteousness of God of which the apostle Paul speaks, and it is the only ground of the sinner's justification.

We may now ask: Why was this ground necessary? Why could not God have behaved in a sovereign way and pardoned the sinner without the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ? In the first place, *the character of God* would not permit this. Each of the arguments set forth at the beginning of this article is based upon an arbitrary selection of the attributes of God. God is all-powerful. But he is also all holy. To declare that God ignores the law (for such is what mere pardon does) because he is all-powerful, is to neglect the important teaching of Scripture that God has an all-holy aversion to sin (*Habakkuk* 1:13) and that he determines to punish it. The true picture is that the God and Father of

Jesus Christ exercises his omnipotence, not to waive the law, but to deal adequately with the sin of those who believe. The law had already been broken. Even an abrogation of the law by God would have come too late. Furthermore, God's law is an essential part of his plan to display his justice and mercy by saving some and punishing others. An abrogation of the law for some would have destroyed that plan.

Once again, the great love of God exercises itself, not in the arbitrary abolition or inconsistent application of the law, but in the minute fulfillment of both precept and penalty of that law by his Son. To see the cross as a demonstration of only the love of God is to fail to see it as the clearest proclamation of how seriously God takes his law, the transgression of his law, and its consequences.

Accusing God of injustice implies a denial of the Trinity. If we view Jesus Christ as merely human, then the accusation of injustice may be inescapable. However, if we hold to the Biblical (and Trinitarian) position that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," then what is said to be unworthy of God is the greatest tribute to God's character. God provides the very satisfaction that his law demands.

No less disrespect and dishonor is done to the holiness of God by those who concede the necessity for a ground of justification but who make that ground either an inward righteousness of the believer or his faith. The character of God not only demands a ground of justification, but also an adequate ground. The only adequate ground recognized by Scripture is the perfect obedience of Christ and his sinless death, fulfilling both the demands and the penalties of the law. We might even say it is to concur in word, thought, and deed to the extent that God himself concurs. Away then with imperfect substitutes such as the "holiness" of sinful men and their faith. Not only does the character of God demand an adequate ground for justification, but also so does *the nature of sin*. All who deny the necessity of the ground of justification or who propose insufficient grounds have a false view of both God's law and sin. The

unrelieved heinousness of sin demands adequate atonement.

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A Timely Message From Screwbaal

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Screwbaal (please, not Screwball): a demon of no small magnitude. My great uncle Screwtape was likewise a high-order demon and well acknowledged and respected by those in our camp years ago. As an arch demon, I have been given numerous tasks by our Father Below. The first and foremost was to overthrow those Christians who hold to the Reformation principles established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Those were bad times for my side; the worst work produced during this time was the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Those Puritan theologians were serious. "What do I do?" I queried. "How do I proceed?"

"Use any method that works," my superiors replied.

Pragmatism is very big in Hell. It is, of course, a real victory for our side that we see it used so prevalently in Christian circles today. Hallelubaa!

My first goal was to move the church away from the Reformation principle of Scripture alone. Second, I wanted to introduce the irrationalism of earlier centuries into Christian circles, especially within (so-called) orthodoxy. These, thought I, are key issues. If I can only achieve success here, the rest will all be downhill.

But how to proceed? Well, my foredevils had some success by causing certain elements of the church to believe that the apostolic gifts, such as prophecy and tongues, were still valid. That, of course, was prior to the writing of the great sixteenth and seventeenth century confessions. And after the Westminster Assembly had so succinctly stated in

chapter 1 of the *Confession*: "Those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased," and then again: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life [what else is there?] is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men," I thought, this could never work again. But, Satan be praised, I was wrong.

You could probably guess that the easiest prey was that segment of Christianity that is not Reformed in theology. Men like Jimmy Swaggart (boy, there was a real lulu) and Pat Robertson (I thought for a while that I could make him president of the United States—can you conceive of the fun I would have had?). As it is, I did get him to start the "Christian Coalition." That was a piece of pork.

The early 1960's were great years. It was at this time that we were able to cause the emotional Pentecostal and charismatic movements to cross denominational barriers. Centuries before "the enthusiasts" had tried to bait Martin Luther into switching his emphasis from salvation by grace through faith alone to "the inner experience" of the Spirit. Sadly, the German Reformer refused, and several of my good friends ended up with slaps on their snouts and ink in their eyes.

But now there is no Luther around to abuse demons. Now, the twentieth century "enthusiasts" have affected most every Protestant church. And at the end of the 1960's we had seen this movement take hold in Roman Catholicism. In earlier centuries, of course, the concept and institution of the papacy was a tremendous work of my foredevils. After the Reformation, though, we never even dreamed that Romanism could be used so effectively again. But the strength of Pentecostal/charismatic thinking allowed us to bridge the gap between Rome and Protestantism once again. (Just recently we have made great inroads uniting Protestants and Romanists in an ecumenical fog. We even have men such as Charles Colson and J. I. Packer endorsing it.)

The truly Reformed camp was more difficult. Nevertheless, undaunted, I set out to accomplish my goal. And within a relatively short period of time (thirty years is not a long time to us), we had not only introduced "the ongoing use of gifts" concept within Reformational Christianity, but we had scored so big, that the Presbyterian Church in America (at least in practice) had acquiesced. How I chortled at Presbytery meeting after Presbytery meeting (you think we don't go?) where one excuse after another was used for accepting men into the ministry who fostered the idea that the "gifts" were still valid. Confessional orthodoxy has become a virtual anachronism in much of Presbyterianism anyhow, thanks to our efforts.

I found another way to attack Scripture in philosophy. If I could only get the church to adopt the notion that one is able to come to a knowledge of the truth by sense experience as well as religious experience, then great progress would be made. Sadly, God raised up a philosopher named Gordon Clark to combat this onslaught of mine. Over and over again in his writings Clark showed how Scripture taught that the Bible alone (and not science or philosophy) has a monopoly on truth. This fellow had to be stopped, but how? Ahh, I mused, I will destroy his credentials before Presbytery. If this can be accomplished, even within his own denomination, we will have gained much headway. I pondered: How about if I can get the Westminster Theological Seminary faculty to attack Clark for being too rational? Well, as you may know, the rest is church history. Thankfully, today's seminaries don't require Clark's works to be read (with the exception of Whitefield Theological Seminary; something must be done about that institution). And few if any "Christian" journals or "scholars" acknowledge his writings. There is still, however, this annoying fly of an institution: The Trinity Foundation, which is trying to reintroduce the thoughts of Clark and Christianity to the church.

Well, this brings me to the second offensive against the church, that is, the reintroduction of irrational thought. It was C. S. Lewis who once wrote: "Those who call for nonsense will find that it comes." I really liked that, and have sought to implement it in the church. The secular academic community has

been anti-intellectual for so long that one philosopher has dubbed the twentieth century the "Age of Irrationalism." But surely the church would not fall into this trap, would they? Well, I thought, it is worth a try. And try I did, with amazing success. Neo-orthodoxy is a direct result of these endeavors. Karl Barth was a real "Satan-send," as was Emil Brunner. They imbibed the illogical. Then, when I got Dooyeweerd and the Amsterdam Philosophy group to erect a "boundary" between God and man, a boundary so fixed that the laws of logic exist only on man's side of the boundary, I had them as well. The real difficulty, or so I thought, would be to infiltrate the Reformed segment of Christianity. After all, these guys are students of Scripture, Augustine, Calvin, and the Westminster divines, men who recognized that the laws of logic are simply the way God thinks, and therefore indispensable in the study of the Bible. I asked my tor-mentors, "Where then should I start?"

"Start at the top," they replied. "Begin with the seminaries."

"Are you joking?" I replied.

"We don't do much of that," said they.

So I went to work, beginning with Fuller and Westminster; and "my, oh my, what a wonderful day!" Within a relatively short period of time we had at least some of the faculty teaching that the Bible contains mistakes and logical paradoxes, that "mere human logic" is not to be trusted, and (shades of Dooyeweerd) that God's logic is different from man's logic. Hallelubaal, "nonsense had come." By the way, I am already making real progress at the other "sems." In fact, we are so sure of our victory that I have received approval to make our successes known more widely. There are, however, still some hold-outs. This guy Clark "still speaks even though he is dead" through his books and the writings of The Trinity Foundation. I have been unable to penetrate this pocket of rational Christianity, but I have not yet given up. The best I have been able to do so far is to make people believe that their writings are not worth reading. I am certainly not pleased with this, particularly now that more and more people are studying Clark and Scripture. But

for now, that's where things stand. I need more help, but bad help is hard to come by these days.

I really need to be off. So much to do, you see. But, Satan willing, I will be back to update you on the whole matter in the months ahead.

Affectionately yours,

Screwbaal, D.D.

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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 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 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 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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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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Justification and the Clarity of the Bible

Edited by John W. Robbins

Justification—the Key to Biblical Clarity

Is the Bible clear and easy to understand? Has the proliferation of divisions within the Protestant movement proved that the Reformers were too optimistic in affirming the clarity of the Bible? If it is clear, why are so many professed Christians so incredibly ignorant of the Bible?

When the Reformers contended that the Bible is clear and easy to understand, they did not mean that it is uniformly so. Obviously, there are difficulties about certain parts of the Bible that may never become clear in this life. Neither did the Reformers close their eyes to the fact that men of scholarship and mental acumen had failed to understand the Bible. But what they did mean was that the Bible is clear when seen in the light of the great Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. The first principle of the Reformation—the Bible alone—and its corollary—justification by faith alone in Christ alone—stand together. If one is lost, so is the other. Said Luther:

If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. . . . It alone makes a person a theologian. . . . For with it comes the Holy Spirit, who enlightens the heart by it and keeps it in the true certain understanding so that it is able precisely and plainly to

distinguish and judge all other articles of faith, and forcefully to sustain them (*What Luther Says*, ed. E. Plass [Concordia, 1959] Vol. 2, 702-714, 715-718).

If these statements by Luther are correct, this means that there is one main reason why the Bible is not clear in today's church. We have lost sight of the truth of justification by faith alone. Let this central Biblical message be restored to its right place, and the Bible will become essentially clear.

Justification Illuminates All Other Truths

The Bible is the revelation of the saving purpose and action of a holy and gracious God. God delivers a handful of believers from the flood, Lot from the flames of Sodom, Israel from the bondage of Egypt, Hezekiah from the threats of Sennacherib, the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, and the Psalmist from the plots of his enemies. All these Old Testament deliverances point forward to that culminating act of righteousness when God the Son himself comes to Earth in the flesh and person of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we see that he is the God who is with his people in bodily infirmities, poverty, suffering, loneliness, and death. In Jesus Christ he is also seen as the God who is for us in the face of everything that is against us. In our alienation from God, only God can help us. He,

therefore, because of love, must leave all, give all, and suffer all. Nor does he fail to redeem his people.

This saving purpose of God carried out by Jesus Christ is what the Bible calls "the righteousness of God" (*Romans* 1:17). It is efficacious for all God chose to be saved, just as God's Old Testament acts of temporal salvation were effective for those chosen to be saved. That is what the entire Bible is about. When the Bible is read and understood in this framework, its message is as clear as the noonday. But if the theme of Christ and justification by faith alone slips out of sight or is even moved from the center, the Bible is no longer clear. It becomes pulled about as if it were a fantastic jigsaw puzzle, or mutilated into a manual of self-improvement, or wrested to sanction any number of bizarre religious experiences, or exploited by those who imagine events in international politics. Even doctrines which are true in themselves become false when they are removed from the Biblical framework and put into an un-Biblical context.

In the first tract written to the English people on behalf of the Reformation, John Bugenhagen declared, "We have only one doctrine: Christ is our righteousness." That expressed the spirit of the Reformation. The "only one doctrine" emphasis of the Reformers did not mean that they ignored other essential doctrines, but they saw the truth of justification by faith in Christ as embracing every other doctrine. It is not good enough to relegate the article of justification by grace alone, for Christ's sake alone, through faith alone, to merely one article of fundamental belief among about six others. It must become the center of all other doctrines. For the doctrine of justification by faith alone, rightly considered, presupposes or implies every other Biblical doctrine. For example:

The Trinity

The central Biblical message about justification by grace alone, for Christ's sake alone, through faith alone makes the truth of the Trinity shine (see *Romans* 3:24-26): "... being justified freely by his grace. . . ." Here we are brought to contemplate the source of salvation in the mind of God the holy Father. "... through the redemption that is in Christ

Jesus . . . his blood. . . ." This points us to the ground of our acceptance in the doing and dying of the God-man, the holy Son. "... through faith. . . ." Since the Bible everywhere testifies that we cannot of ourselves come to God or believe in Jesus Christ, this points us to the way in which salvation is applied to our hearts by the work of God the Holy Spirit. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (*John* 3:16).

The electing love of God the Father, the life and death of Jesus Christ, the God-man, and the faith placed in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit teach the truth of the Trinity. The Trinity accomplishes our salvation.

Law and Human Depravity

The message of grace alone, Christ alone, and faith alone presupposes man's utter lostness. The *alone* underlines the fact that the fallen sinner can make no contribution to his salvation. The price of redemption, even the blood of the Lord of glory, makes it clear that every ordinary human work is valueless to procure salvation. *Grace alone* means to be accepted in spite of being unacceptable. *Christ alone* means that we have absolutely no righteousness before God but Jesus Christ. *Faith alone* means that we confess that the only thing about us which is good is that God has pronounced us good out of sheer mercy toward us and out of sheer justice for Jesus Christ. Sin cost Adam and Eve their home in Paradise and a son torn from them by the murderer's hand. It cost the Jews their beloved city and their children who were carried away by rapacious armies. But even that could but dimly portray the cost of sin. It cost God a sacrifice so great that it contained all the accumulated treasure of eternity. He gave his Son over to the murderer's hand. This is the only context—the Biblical context—in which to deal with the doctrine of human depravity.

Election

The Bible gives election its proper framework when it presents it as election "in Christ" (*Ephesians* 1:4).

Salvation is wholly due to God's initiative in Jesus Christ. He chose, sought, and found his people. We did not choose, seek, and find him. Our salvation is grounded in his prior decision to save his people through Jesus Christ. God elects, the Son saves those chosen by the Father, and the Spirit gives the gift of faith to his people. Therefore, the "full assurance of faith" does not rest on the slender thread of our own fickle decisions or our own sinful acts. Our faith or works can never be a contribution to or cause of our election, since God elected Jesus Christ and his people in him long before we came to faith. Election is the cause, not the result, of our faith.

The Divine and Human Christ

Since it was from man that justice required perfect righteousness, God the Son had to become a man. That righteousness which God can accept must be a human righteousness, "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead" (*1 Corinthians* 15:21). But because sinful man could not obey the law, the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate in Jesus Christ. What neither God nor man could do alone (for God could not suffer and die, and man could not live a perfect life), the God-man Jesus Christ accomplished.

Upon a life I could not live

And upon a death I did not die

I stake my whole eternity.

Final Judgment

The doctrine of final rewards and punishments is illuminated by the cross of Christ. "He who by faith is justified shall live" (*Romans* 1:17). In the one who was raised because of our justification (*Romans* 4:25) and who bodily ascended to glory at God's right hand we are given a clear preview of eschatology. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (*Romans* 8:1). The saints shall be "glorified together" with Christ. While he who believes is justified unto life eternal, he who believes not is condemned already. The wrath of God abides on

him (*John* 3:36). We are not left to speculate about all the fantastic and unbiblical ideas that some people propound in the doctrine of the hereafter. God has shown us the nature of Hell and death, for in the cross of Christ "the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (*Romans* 1:18). Christ's cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" was his descent into Hell. He did not descend into Hell after his death; rather, he went, as he said, with the thief, to Paradise. As we follow the bruised and lifeless body of the Savior to the tomb, we see clearly what are the wages of sin—*death*. Death is no phantom, but it is God's judgment on sinful man. It is as concrete and as real as the execution and burial of Jesus Christ. No one spoke more of the final judgment and horribleness of Hell than Jesus Christ.

Justification Exposes Errors

If the doctrine of justification by faith alone illuminates all other doctrines, it exposes errors at the same time. It is a divine plumb line to test every doctrinal structure. It is a principle that must call all our creeds, ideas, and traditions into radical question. Perhaps this is one reason why the professing church has pushed the Reformation doctrine into the background. If it is allowed to stand in the forefront, it is too revolutionary and might upset the status quo. *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda** is a confession that the Reformation was not completed with Luther and Calvin. The sanctuary of truth must yet be cleansed from all the errors that were smuggled in during the Dark Ages. We have no reason to suppose the restoration was completed by the Reformers. Error is like an octopus. It has many tentacles, but one heart. Most of the books written to expose the errors of certain cults or false systems tediously fight with all the tentacles of the doctrinal octopus. Few effectively slay it at the heart with the sharp sword of justification by faith alone.

Look how Luther dealt with the papacy. Others before and after him spent their energies crying out against the abuses of Rome. Said Luther:

Doubtless this one article [justification], by little and little, as it began, had overthrown the whole papacy, with all her brotherhoods, pardons, religious orders, relics, ceremonies, invocation of saints, purgatory, masses, watchings, vows, and infinite other like abominations. . . . We moreover did teach and urge nothing but this article of justification, which alone at that time did threaten the authority of the Pope and lay waste his kingdom. . . . Images and other abuses in the church would have fallen down of themselves, if they [the sects] had but diligently taught the article of justification (*Commentary on Galatians*, Middleton ed., 218, 219).

Luther cut through the complicated maze of medieval theology and reduced all theology to the principle of *sola fide*. The Christian church today is inundated with *isms* of every stripe and hue. We could spend forever and aye fighting the tentacles of error, but we need to get to the heart. All error is united in its common opposition to the principle of justification by faith alone. All error obscures the bright light of the Gospel. What the church and the world desperately need is the truth of justification by faith alone without the encumbrance of the popular errors which have obscured it.

Romanism

The doctrine of justification by God's mercy alone, on the ground of what Christ has already done, and through the vicarious righteousness of Christ that is imputed through faith alone, is a radical "No" to Romanism. While Roman theologians may sometimes use the words of the Reformation or the Bible, this does not mean that the words have the same content. According to the Romanists, "justification by grace" means to be righteous in the sight of God because the soul is inwardly adorned with grace (*gratia infusa*). "Justification by Christ" means to be made righteous by the actual indwelling of Christ's pure life which is substituted (internally) for the impure life of the sinner. "Justification by faith" means that faith itself as a *qualitas* makes the believer righteous in the sight of God.

While ignorant Protestants may applaud the changes taking place in Rome, in reality nothing has changed at all. The organization which has proved itself capable of adopting the institutions of paganism and adapting them to its own use can also adopt the slogans of Protestantism and adapt them to its own use.

The Reformation principle of justification by faith alone always points to the saving realities that are completely outside of man. *Grace* is pure mercy that is outside of man in the heart of God. The righteousness that justifies is outside of man, for it is the obedience which Jesus Christ performed two thousand years ago. In justification this righteousness is not infused, but *imputed*. It is not in man, who is on Earth, but in Christ, who is in Heaven. Faith justifies, not because it has any intrinsic merit, but solely because it is the only instrument that accepts and can accept the imputed gift. Justification by faith alone means that I live in the favor of God by the righteousness which is found in another. It means to be accepted as righteous because another is righteous. In every way it leads me "to the Rock which is higher than I."

What happens in Romanism is that everything is internalized. The words *grace*, *righteousness*, *justification*, *substitution* may remain, but they no longer have the objective meaning. The work of the Holy Spirit *in us* is substituted for the work of Christ *for us* as the cause of pardon and acceptance. The inward renewal of the believer is put in the place of the imputed righteousness of Christ. God's transforming act *in man* displaces God's redemptive act *for man*. The focus of attention is not outward, but inward; not in Heaven at the right hand of God, but "in the cave of the heart" and in "the new interior life." What remains objective in Romanism is not the work of Christ, but the work of the Antichrist and his priests, which Rome calls the church.

We deal with Rome at the head of all the religious *isms* because she is the "mother" of "the abominations of the Earth" (see *Revelation 17:5*). It is this system which most perfectly epitomizes all false religions. Every devious *ism* can find its true home here, for the common denominator of all false

religion is its preoccupation with the interior life of the worshiper.

Pentecostalism

The truth of justification by faith alone judges and condemns the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. No one can believe justification by faith alone and at the same time consistently subscribe to the basic principles of Pentecostalism.

We do not deny that there may be true Christians who subscribe to the Pentecostal thesis. Some people's minds are wonderfully confused. But there are four points that must be raised about Pentecostalism in the light of justification:

1. When God justifies the sinner for the sake of Christ alone, he does this by ascribing to the believer all that Christ did in his holy obedience on our behalf. All that Christ is, all his unconquerable righteousness with all that it merits and inherits, belongs to the needy sinner whom the Holy Spirit joins to Christ in saving faith. This is the gift that comprehends and swallows up all else.

Now, if our Pentecostal friends confess with us the magnitude of this gift of justification, why do they talk about the experience of being baptized in the Spirit as if it were something higher and better than what every believer in Jesus possesses?

The present gift of the Holy Spirit is only the "down payment" (Ephesians 1:13, 14) of what we inherited through Jesus Christ. The grace of justification is like the water in the whole ocean. The inward experience is like the little shell holding some of that water. A gift which can be reduced to the dimension of the experience of a sinful mortal is not very big after all.

2. When Pentecostalism teaches a religious experience after justification and conversion, it implies that the free gift of Christ's righteousness to the believer does not suffice to bring the in-filling, or baptism, of the Holy Spirit.

But justification means that since Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, God must not only regard him but treat him as righteous. Is

not a justified man righteous with God? Does not God delight in and love to embrace a righteous man? The apostle Paul says that the Spirit comes with the blessing of justification (Romans 4:1-4; 8:1-10; Galatians 3:1-14; Ephesians 1:24; etc.). A justification before God which does not bring the Holy Spirit *abundantly* (Titus 3:5-8) is not justification at all and would merit very little talking about—which is generally the case among charismatic enthusiasts.

3. If the reception of Christ's imputed righteousness by faith alone does not bring with it the abundant gift of the Spirit, other steps or techniques must be resorted to in order to obtain "Heaven's best." Here the door is opened to a new kind of legalism. People become obsessed with getting the Spirit by their own acts of "absolute surrender," "total dedication," "eradication of the self," or "putting Jesus on the throne of your life." The attention is turned from the Gospel message that Christ has actually won the Spirit for the believer by his own acts of absolute surrender, total dedication, and the putting away of sin which took place on Calvary (Acts 2:33; Galatians 3:13, 14; John 7:38, 39).

Paul reminded the foolish Galatians that the Spirit *came* (Galatians 3:2) and *continues to be given abundantly* (Galatians 3:5, literal translation) by the hearing of faith. Gospel preaching is proclaiming how the Spirit comes to men by the conquering acts of Jesus Christ on man's behalf. Galatianism proclaims how men may earn the Spirit.

4. The overwhelming preoccupation of Pentecostalism is the inward life of the believer. Its predominant testimony is to the inward experience of the Spirit rather than to the historical action of God in Jesus Christ. For this reason, Pentecostal spirituality is in fundamental harmony with Roman Catholic spirituality. Pentecostalism has been able to bridge the gulf between Romanism and apostate Protestantism, but the traffic across that bridge is mostly one way. Every religious experience which is a denial of justification by faith alone finds its home in Rome.

Subjectivism

The doctrine of justification by an imputed (outside-of-me) righteousness directs us to find salvation in a saving event which is completely outside of us. Just as we were constituted sinners by what Adam did in an historical event, so the believer is justified unto life eternal by what Christ did in an historical event (Romans 5:18, 19). John Bunyan testified:

As for thy saying that salvation is Christ within, if thou mean in opposition to Christ without, instead of pleading for Christ thou wilt plead against him; for Christ, God-man, without on the cross, did bring in salvation for sinners; and the right believing of that justifies the soul. Therefore Christ within or the Spirit of him who did give himself a ransom, doth not work out justification for the soul in the soul, but doth lead the soul out of itself and out of what can be done in itself, to look for salvation in that Man that is now absent from his saints on Earth. . . .

And indeed they that will follow Christ aright must follow him without, to the cross without, for justification on Calvary without—that is, they must seek for justification by his obedience without—to the grave without, and to his ascension and intercession in Heaven without; and this must be done through the operation of his own Holy Spirit that he has promised shall show these things unto them, being given within them for that purpose. Now the Spirit of Christ, that leads also; but whither? It leads to the Christ without (*The Riches of Bunyan* [New York: American Tract Society, 1850] 142, 143).

This doctrine of justification is a radical "No" to religious subjectivism. We have already considered two major forms of religious subjectivism—Romanism and Pentecostalism—but it must also be said that the neo-evangelical movement has drowned in it too. Neo-evangelicals who internalize or psychologize the Gospel have no good reason to oppose Pentecostals or Romanists, for the theology is the same.

We are not trying to minimize the necessity of regeneration, the indwelling of the Spirit, and holiness. What we are against in the name of the Gospel is a distortion of these things which makes them utterly false. For instance:

New Birth: The new birth is a radical change wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, which turns the chosen one from unbelief to assent to the truth of the Gospel. The sinner now agrees that Christ alone is the basis of salvation. He lives a new life of faith in the Son of God—continually confessing his sinfulness, always relying on Christ's merits, and habitually obeying his commandments. If we are going to advocate this kind of new birth, this can only magnify the glory of Christ's imputed righteousness.

But what often happens is that the "born again" experience (regeneration is never experienced, but its effects are) is put in the place of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Conversion becomes in itself the grand saving event or the "finished work" which guarantees eternal security. Baptism becomes the grand memorial and celebration of this new life within. The Biblical doctrine of salvation and security in an "alien righteousness" is utterly against this popular and perverted concept of new birth.

Christ Within. The present age requires clear discernment on the part of God's people because the same words and expressions can be and have been given totally different meanings. We have seen how Rome can use the slogans of the Reformation and yet mean something totally different. The same thing happens with the expression "Christ in our hearts by faith." People get the idea that Christ comes into their hearts so that their inward experience itself becomes "the hope of glory." Instead of directing their whole attention to the majestic, incomparable Person of Christ as exalted Lord in the throne room of God's heavenly temple (Hebrews 8:1, 2; Revelation 11:19), they focus on the human heart as the real throne room of the Lord of glory.

A certain crusade leader proudly introduced his latest convert in the city of Denver: "Tell him about your experience, Harry," said the leader. "Jesus Christ has become so real to me," beamed Harry as he clutched his very over-sized belly, "because I've got him right in here." This sort of talk is dishonoring to the majesty and glory of the Christ who presides at the right hand of God.

The Spirit-filled Life. The truth of justification by faith alone means preoccupation with Christ's experience and not our own. This is what frees us from egocentric concerns so that we may live lives of holiness (Isaiah 53:11).

It sets us at liberty to live for God's glory rather than our own. Much of the current enthusiasm for the "Spirit-filled life" bears little resemblance to the Spirit-filled witnessing which is recorded in the New Testament. The dissimilarity lies in a totally different understanding of the Holy Spirit's work. William Childs Robinson makes this comparison in his book, *The Reformation: A Rediscovery of Grace* (Eerdmans):

Indeed, the enthusiasts so emphasized the sovereign freedom of the Spirit as to sever the connection between the mission of the Spirit and the historical Christ. Their emphasis fell upon the subjective experience of the Spirit in the individual rather than upon the Spirit's mission of enabling the believer to appropriate the redemption wrought by Christ in his incarnate life. . . . God's objective revelation of himself is the work of Christ; God's subjective revelation that of the Spirit. The Spirit speaks not of himself; he takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us, thus glorifying him (John 16:13-24). In severing this connection, enthusiasm left itself with no objective criterion and exposed itself to the danger of unregulated spirituality. Instead of the saving knowledge of God revealed in Jesus Christ, it offered sundry varieties of religious experience. For, "where the Holy Spirit is sundered from Christ, sooner or later, he is always transmuted into quite a different spirit, the spirit of religious man, and finally the human spirit in general." As Luther pointed out, the Holy Spirit is called a witness, because he witnesses to Christ and to no other. The Apostles declare, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5). . . .

The true Holy Spirit comes from God, from the ascended Christ, and brings in his hand to shed abroad in our hearts the love of God revealed in the death of Christ for sinners. Consequently it is not enough for a preacher to be a religious genius who fancies that by the recital of his own or some others' current experiences he can awaken the dormant

possibilities of religion in the heart of the hearer. Nor is it sufficient to have a philosopher of religion presenting himself as an example of faith or as a possessor of human understanding, or even using the crucifixion of Jesus or the stoning of Stephen as a stimulus to bring an existential decision to a student. While these may give the appearance of devotion to Christ they do not locate the glory of salvation in his atoning work for us. Rather, "the historical revelation of Christ is treated as the stimulus to a subjective spiritual experience in the individual, not as itself the content of that experience. The spiritualist individual experiences his conversion and the resultant spiritual glow rather than Jesus Christ and him crucified," so that "when he bears testimony, it is to speak of his new found peace and happiness rather than to confess that Jesus is Lord."

Representatives of this school frequently declare that it is not the birth in Bethlehem but the re-birth in their hearts which counts, not the cross on Golgotha but their own dedication to live for eternity rather than time, not his bodily resurrection but their own faith in immortality. But true preaching from the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost leads the hearer back through all his experiences to the source of all true and proper experiences; that is, to Jesus Christ. It calls him to no other faith than faith in the Christ who was born in Bethlehem, who died for our sins on Calvary, who rose from the dead on the third day (172, 173).

We wish that these penetrating comments by Dr. Robinson could be read and re-read by every neo-evangelical. What he says is the heritage of the Reformation. It is the truth of justification by faith alone.

Dispensationalism

Our dispensationalist friends do acknowledge the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Our earnest appeal is that the truth of justification by faith alone, which dispensationalists profess, be allowed to call every system and doctrinal edifice into radical question.

The dispensationalist is comfortable when the doctrine of justification is just one of a number of doctrinal beliefs. But it is a different matter entirely when justification by faith alone becomes so central and all-embracing that it becomes the hermeneutical principle that determines our view of everything else.

No one who genuinely and consistently holds to the apostolic and Reformation principle of justification by faith alone can be a dispensationalist. It is as simple as that, and for the following reasons:

1. The New Testament everywhere testifies that Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament hopes and promises, "that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus" (Acts 13:32, 33). "For all the promises of God find their Yes (fulfillment) in Him" (2 Corinthians 1:20). In Jesus Christ, God has made an end of sin, abolished death, given Israel peace, wisdom, wealth, and righteousness. In him the old order has passed away and all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Old Testament declares, "Behold, the days come . . .," and, "it shall come to pass. . . ." But the New Testament points to Christ and says: "The hour . . . now is" "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Unless we believe that all that God promised to the Jews has *really* been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we admit to unbelieving Jews that Jesus is not the true Messiah. Of course, when Jesus comes again, there will be an open disclosure of his victory to the whole world. It has already been accomplished in him. We believe it and possess it all by faith. But it will be openly revealed at the end of the world.

2. Paul tells the foolish Galatians in the plainest of terms that justification by Christ alone (Galatians 2:17) is the blessing which God had promised the seed of Abraham (see Galatians 3). Any Jew who is justified by the righteousness of Jesus Christ has received all that God has promised to Abraham and his posterity.

3. The Gentile Galatians knew that the promises of God were to Abraham and his seed. They desperately wanted to become part of Abraham's family. They were led to believe that this coveted

status could be conferred on them by way of circumcision. Paul was indignantly amazed. He told them that this was a denial of the Gospel. He declared that Christ was the Seed to whom all the promises were made (Galatians 3:16, 19). He is the Seed of Abraham—that is to say, the Israel of God personified. To belong to Christ is to belong to Israel: "if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). To be in Christ is to be in Israel: "Know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7). Could words be plainer?

How could Christians, above all people, encourage Jews to look to some political events in Palestine for the fulfillment of Old Testament promises instead of pointing to their glorious fulfillment in the Person and work of Jesus Christ? Justification by faith in Christ is the blessing of Abraham. All who have it are children of Abraham without distinction. And these and none else are "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). That is why the truth of justification is a radical "No" to dispensationalism. Dispensationalism could only grow in a climate where the doctrine of justification is not central and all-embracing.

In its method of separating the Old Testament from the New Testament, dispensationalism has its roots in the movement called Enthusiasm. Says Dr. Robinson:

In the interests of the continuity of the Church, the evangelical church likewise opposes the enthusiasts who separate the Old Testament believers from the New Testament faith. . . . Luther's *Introduction to the Old Testament* shows that this part of the Bible was also a book of faith about such believers as Abraham and David. Bucer accepted the patriarchs, who held to the promises, as men of faith; while for Zwingli and his successor Bullinger, "Abraham participated in the one eternal covenant and rejoiced." God has only one people; our faith is a unit with that of Abraham; the New is the further unfolding of the Old Covenant. Calvin shows that all those whom God has adopted into the society of his people are in the very same covenant, for even the Old Testament saint was offered the hope of

immortality, founded on the mere mercy of God and confirmed by the mediation of Christ (*Institutes* II, x, 1-4) (171).

Perfectionism

The crucial doctrine of Perfectionism is that it is possible for the believer, even before his death, to attain perfection. . . . that the believer is able completely to transcend the pollution of sin. In this respect there is considerable agreement between Perfectionism and Catholicism (G.C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 49, 53).

Perfectionism may assume a number of forms—some more moderate, like that in the teaching of John Wesley, and some quite radical, like the doctrine of sinless perfection found among some sects. There is the holiness doctrine, which advocates a "second blessing" wherein the "old man," or sinful nature, is crucified in the believer in a second crisis experience subsequent to conversion. There is the "absolute surrender" doctrine of Andrew Murray, which proposes that this is the way to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. There are those who advocate victory-life piety without taking due cognizance of the reality of indwelling sin in all believers. And there are those who talk about the indwelling of Christ or the Spirit in substitutionary terms—i.e., as if the Spirit takes over in such a way that he actually lives the victory life for the Christian.

The Reformation, with all its great creeds and confessions, is hostile to perfectionism because it stands on the primacy, centrality, and all-sufficiency of justification by faith alone. It does not deny the necessity or reality of holiness, but it also takes cognizance of the reality of indwelling sin in all believers.

Life cannot be fulfilled in the historical process, and the believer confesses that his completeness is realized only in Christ (Colossians 2:10). The self-condemning utterances of prophets and apostles throughout the Bible (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 143:2; Philippians 3:11-14; Romans 7:14-25; James 3:2; 1 John 1:8) are not excuses for sin, but

confessions of sin; and the entire church militant must join them in the confession that human nature is sinful. The Biblical truth of *righteousness by faith alone* means that in this life we are not righteous before God by regeneration, baptism of the Spirit, lives of new obedience, or by any inward experience or actual work. We are righteous with God only by faith—and "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). To be inwardly perfect does not belong to the righteousness of faith, but it is the righteousness of good works, of the law (Romans 8:4). To be righteous by faith until Jesus comes implies that in ourselves we will be sinners until Jesus comes, for the righteousness of faith is only for sinners.

"Justification by faith (not perfectionism) is really the only answer to the moral perplexities of the doctrine of original sin" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: An Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles*, 193). It is justification which guarantees our glorification at the end of the world (Romans 5:1, 2; 8:30).

Flesh and Spirit must wage a bitter and unrelenting conflict (Galatians 5:17), and hope yearns for the reality of full redemption and righteousness when Christ shall come (Romans 8:23; Galatians 5:5; Hebrews 11:40).

Perfectionism denies the all-sufficiency and centrality, if not the primacy, of justification by faith. It inevitably becomes preoccupied with the inward life. Contrary to the image it seeks to project, perfectionism is not the negation of sin, but the perpetuation of it. In trying to fulfill life and history here and now, it robs the believer of his hope in the there and then.

Optionalism

There is a teaching, very widespread in some circles, which says that if a person once professes to be a Christian, he cannot be lost even if he utterly denies the faith in subsequent word or conduct. This idea makes such a separation between justification and sanctification—and between justification and belief—that it proposes that an unsanctified or

unbelieving man can still be justified. We call this optionalism because it makes a life of holiness—and even belief—optional for professed Christians.

If without adding "by faith," the Bible taught that justification was by grace on the grounds of Christ's righteousness, there might be some grounds for optionalism. But a proper consideration of the instrumental "by faith" utterly rules out this possibility.

Justification by faith means that only the one who believes (present tense) is justified. In most instances the Greek word for *believe* is in the present tense. He who does not presently believe has no grounds at all for supposing that he is presently justified. A Christian is a believer. He is not a man who once believed.

Optionalism not only denies justification by faith alone, but teaches that faith is not a divine gift, and the perseverance of the saints is false.

We must therefore insist that justification is *by faith alone*. As Luther says, he that believes possesses all things, and he that does not believe possesses nothing. Hebrews 11:1 calls faith the "title deeds" ("substance"). Without a present faith, there is no "title deed" to justification. We do not deny—we insist—that there is security for the believer. We deny that there is security for an unbeliever.

We have continually drawn attention to the objective (outside-of-me) nature of God's gracious act in justifying the sinner. The saving action of God took place "outside of me" in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the doctrine of justification by *imputation* teaches us that our salvation, righteousness, security, and everlasting life are all outside of us in the Person of Christ. But the error which we are here discussing internalizes "the finished work," and it internalizes security. In much of the literature and teaching which we have examined, optionalism equates the new-birth event with the finished work of Christ and leads people to put their faith in this internal experience as the guarantee of their security. The basis for their assurance is some memory of a conversion experience. It is not the promise, which they do not believe.

Legalism

Legalism bases acceptance with God, ultimately if not initially, on something within man. Fulfillment of the command of God (law) becomes the means to salvation. Like sin, legalism is easier to see in others than in ourselves. Because it is the spirit of sinful man, we are never entirely free from it except by grace.

Legalism can assume a great variety of forms:

First, there is that overt kind of legalism which says that justification is not *by faith alone*, but by obedience to certain commandments. Some say it is by obedience to the Ten Commandments, while others say it is by obedience to the command of baptism or other evangelical duties.

A more subtle variety of legalism is that which makes obedience to "evangelical" laws the means of salvation. Instead of really preaching the Gospel of what Christ has done in winning salvation, it preaches the "gospel" of things man must do—like repentance, confession, surrender, faith, baptism, etc. It is not wrong for advocating the necessity of some of those things, but because it alters the order of salvation. It leaves the impression that salvation comes into existence when *we* take the initiative and *do* these things. Salvation becomes the divine response to human action. This brand of legalism preaches how man comes to God. God does nothing for the poor sinner until he takes the necessary steps. Far different is the Gospel, which proclaims that the sinner may repent, believe, and be baptized only because his salvation has already been accomplished by Jesus Christ.

Then there is a *pneumatic legalism*, which advocates receiving the Spirit by the fulfillment of all sorts of steps and conditions. The condition for receiving the Spirit is perfect righteousness. Legalism places this condition on the back of the believer, whereas the Gospel places it on the shoulders of Jesus Christ.

Legalism has its roots in sinful ignorance—(ignorance of the exalted holiness of God's law on the one hand, and ignorance of the defiled and radical corruption of human nature on the other

hand). The truth of justification by faith alone exposes this sinful ignorance. It proclaims that the law of God is so strict in its claims that only the obedience of him who was filled with all the fulness of the Godhead bodily could satisfy its justice on our behalf. In the light of the inestimable obedience of Jesus Christ, the best we could ever offer the law would be, as Luther said, "rotten stubble and straw."

Antinomianism

Antinomianism means *against-the-law-ism*. It views God's law itself as the real enemy. (Legalism is, paradoxically, a type of antinomianism.) Antinomianism proposes that since the believer is saved by grace alone, he must henceforth have no dealings with the moral law. The age of the Spirit, it is said, has superseded the age of law.

Antinomianism is the essence of the sinful human condition: "Sin is lawlessness," said the apostle John (1 John 3:4), and Paul declares, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

Antinomianism in one form or another is undoubtedly a principal error in today's churches.

Conscientious obedience to the objective Word of God is often branded as legalism. As an unprecedented flood of lawlessness, crime, and moral corruption is sweeping away the foundations of society, the church itself appears like a shorn Samson before the Philistines. How can a church which has become riddled with antinomian sentiments have any real word of the Lord for a sinful, permissive society? Instead of standing unflinchingly for the moral absolutes of the Ten Commandments, the professing church is often found accommodating God's law to current social norms.

It is perilous to discuss sin. When Eve entered a dialogue with the devil about the forbidden tree, she surrendered her only vantage ground. The mere fact that she entered the dialogue was compromise. What business has the Church to talk with the ungodly about the pros and cons of adultery and homosexuality? If God's Word does not clearly

define sin, each man is left to define it for himself. Man—especially religious man—attempts to take the place of God himself as lawgiver and judge of all. That is why antinomians turn out to be legalists. Arminians tend to be antinomians for they believe that Christ died for all men. The logic of their core belief implies that God will punish none.

Antinomianism needs to be recognized in its varied and deceptive plumage. It does not always blatantly say, "Christ has died for our sins so that we can live as we please since he will not punish anyone." That would be too obviously wrong for some Christians to swallow. The lethal pill may be chocolate-coated, sugar-coated, and honey-coated; but it is a lethal pill just the same.

To start with, we have to agree with the Puritan Walter Marshall, who said that legalism is the worst form of antinomianism. Legalism always pretends to honor the law of God. Yet it does not honor the moral law, but dishonors it. The law of God demands perfect righteousness, and this is satisfied by nothing less than the holy obedience of Jesus Christ. To present to the justice of God's law anything less than the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is not *legal* (lawful), but *illegal* (unlawful). It is inevitable that the legalist must try to cut the law down to his own size. This is what the Pharisees did. In trying to cut the law down to their own puny standard, they actually made void the law through their traditions. On the other hand, Jesus magnified the law to terrifying proportions. In the light of his exaltation of the law, we see that only in him is there a righteousness with which the law is well pleased.

But let us not run to the opposite error and brand the spirit of conscientious obedience to the commandments of God as legalism. Calvin was prepared to put his life on the line to keep profane persons from partaking of the elements of holy communion. That was not legalism. A pious Welsh lassie was given over to the stake by the consent of Cranmer and Ridley because she believed that she must obey God and be baptized by immersion. Hers was not legalism.

It is a corruption of the message of grace when people think they have to live like the world and despise a disciplined, well-ordered life just to prove that they are not legalistic. This lack of Christian discipline is its own form of legalism—the legalism of thinking that such indifference to law makes a man pleasing to God.

Subjectivism is another form of antinomianism because it tends to substitute the inward experience of "love" or "the Spirit-filled life" for the objective law of God. Without the objective law of God, love becomes blind sentimentalism or situation ethics. Those who are overconfident about being led by the Spirit are in danger of confusing the human spirit with God's Spirit. Who is harder to convince with "It is written" than the enthusiast who is intoxicated with his experience "in he Spirit"? The objective Word means nothing to him when it contradicts his experience.

The notion that love or the Holy Spirit takes the place of the objective law of God goes hand in hand with the teaching of dispensationalism. Dispensationalism proposes that the age of law has been superseded by the age of grace, and sets one against the other. Oswald T. Allis was right when he wrote that dispensationalism is based on antinomian premises (Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972], 37-43).

What does the great doctrine of justification by faith alone say to all these forms of antinomianism?

In the first place, God's grace justifies the sinner on the grounds of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:18, 19). This righteousness consists in Christ's obedience to the law of God on our behalf. By his sinless life Christ fulfilled every precept of the law, and by his death he satisfied every penalty on behalf of all who would believe on him. God did not save any man by skirting around his law. He did not send his Son to weaken its force or to create a lower standard. As John Flavell said, never was the law of God more highly honored than when the Son of God stood before its bar of justice to make reparations for the damage done.

In the second place, the believing sinner is personally justified when God imputes to him Christ's perfect obedience to the law. This is the Father's robe of righteousness woven in the loom of Heaven. It is therefore utterly inconceivable that a believer can wear the Father's robe while despising his law. Justification is a *legal* term.

Justification means that the believing sinner, through the righteousness of Christ alone, satisfies the requirements of the law. Salvation is not only salvation *from* sin, but salvation *to* holiness. While it is certain that no man is saved by his holiness it is also certain that he is saved *to* holiness. No one is saved by the keeping of God's commandments, but all who are saved are saved *to* a new life of keeping God's commandments. It is impossible to be justified without being sanctified. Holiness is no blissful euphoria or ecstatic froth and bubble. It is a life of obedience to God.

Conclusion

The popular errors which have overrun the churches and which have obscured the clear light of the Gospel are not so different as they may appear on the surface. As Luther remarked about the papists and the Enthusiasts, they are like Samson's foxes—their tails are tied together although their heads are pointing in different directions.

For instance, Pentecostalism and dispensationalism stand opposed to each other in their understanding of the age of the special gifts of the Spirit. But they have a common bond in their denial of the place which the New Testament gives to justification by faith alone. Pentecostalism denies that it brings the fulfillment of God's promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Dispensationalism denies that it brings the fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews.

The heads of legalism and antinomianism may point in different directions, but their tails are tied together. We have seen that legalism is the worst form of antinomianism. Likewise, antinomianism, which puts the leading of an inward experience in the place of the objective law, must end up as the worst kind of legalism.

Each *ism* which we have examined is a radical departure from the truth of justification by faith alone.

The Biblical doctrine of justification places grace, the saving action of God, justification, perfection, security, and the law outside of man. The one thing necessary in man is faith, a gift from God, which abides in the heart by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christian faith is focused outside of oneself on Christ, both for righteousness to stand before God and for guidance to walk before him. The eye of faith sees only Christ in the sanctuary of Heaven at God's right hand.

Beginning with Rome, we have seen that the *mark* of error is that it casts the truth down to the ground, internalizing it within man himself. Rome internalizes saving grace and saving righteousness. Pentecostalism internalizes Christian witnessing, for it witnesses to inner experience. Neo-evangelical subjectivism internalizes the throne room of Christ and his substantial presence. Perfectionism internalizes the Christian's completeness. Legalism internalizes the basis of acceptance with God. Antinomianism internalizes the law. Optionalism internalizes the finished work of Christ and eternal security.

This is all the spirit of sinful man's substituting himself for Christ. Here is the real spirit of the man of sin, the Antichrist who has cast down the place of Christ's sanctuary and "the truth to the ground" (see Daniel 8:11, 12). It is the wine of Babylon by which the enemy has confused God's people and held them in bondage. Yet the messenger who bears the everlasting Gospel, or the truth of justification by faith alone (Revelation 14:6), is followed by another, who says, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen . . ." (Revelation 14:8). Thank God that the hosts of evil have no power to hold the church captive, for the Gospel of Jesus Christ overthrows the strongholds of error. The sanctuary of truth, so long cast down and defiled by the errors which have been smuggled in, is restored to its rightful place through the pure teaching of the everlasting Gospel.

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