

SANCTIFICATION  
("Christ liveth in me")

Chairman:

Mr. John Slade:

The real absence of soul sanctification and Christian perseverance in the churches is a cause for most serious concern by all thoughtful Christian leaders. What is responsible for the dearth of vital godliness? Is it because of too much emphasis on the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, or lack of it?

Our first speaker of the evening is Pastor Renner of the Nundah Lutheran Church.

Pastor Renner:

It is my conviction that if we have very lucidly described justification, then the whole question of sanctification (the new life in Jesus Christ), is going to fall into place, and we are going to have a clear understanding of what sanctification really is, and of its significance in our lives.

I believe that when the message of justification by faith has not been adequately proclaimed, and has not been lucidly taught in the churches, that you immediately get a false view of sanctification. Sanctification becomes a sort of a proof of justification, and when we have got that then the whole of the certainty of salvation is affected. In fact it is called into jeopardy.

Tonight I want to speak in particular upon the subject, "Sanctification as God's work in the justified sinner." In an altogether too brief statement, I want to concentrate upon this theme of sanctification, in the life of the justified sinner. I fear very much that there is always the danger that well-meaning theologians will so confuse sanctification and justification, or will so separate them that each is robbed of its true character, that as a consequence man's certainty of salvation is diminished and his service as a Christian to His Lord is impaired. It is necessary for us to know and teach what justification is in Biblical theology, what sanctification is, wherein their inseparability and their diversity from each other lies. Only then shall we see and understand them as co-ordinated activities of God which bring glory to His name and peace and joy to His people.

Briefly then, what do the Scriptures understand by justification? At the risk of over-simplification (and I am afraid we have to expose ourselves to over-simplification while we are dealing fairly quickly with a subject as profound and extensive as this one is), the Scriptures mean by justification, God's acceptance of the fallen sinner, God's declaration of righteousness upon the fallen sinner on account of Jesus Christ. The sinner is absolved from his inherent unrighteousness, he is reconciled with God. His sins are forgiven, he is adopted as God's child only on account of Jesus Christ, and all that while he is a sinner.

The sinner who had become thoroughly alienated from God in the fall, who had sunk so deeply into his hostile God estrangement, and enmity against God that he could not begin to move towards God, this renegade prodigal wretch is declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the well-deserved sentence of condemnation and rejection and is adopted into sonship by God and is made heir of eternal life, not by any

merit or worth of his own, not because of any preceding or present or subsequent virtue and achievement of his own, but entirely and solely out of grace, i.e. undeserved divine favour, because of the merit of Jesus Christ and His complete and perfect obedience, and His bitter suffering and His vicarious death. Justification does not mean in the Scripture, that the sinner is made righteous. He remains a sinner to his dying day, but it means rather that he is declared righteous. As Romans 4:5 puts it: "His faith is reckoned for righteousness", even while he remains a sinner. This righteousness which is perfect and complete, is not seen by him, it is outside of him in the person of Jesus Christ Himself. It is not manifested in all kinds of saintliness, which he might now suddenly possess. It isn't even sensed by him or experienced by him, or felt by him in all kinds of euphoria, all kinds of feelings of well-being, and so forth. It is rather something on the basis of God's own Word. He believes, and believing cancels out sight. His life and experience rather testifies to the opposite, if he is really honest with himself. Namely that he is still imperfect, that he still sins daily, that he is in fact increasingly conscious of his imperfections, increasingly aware of his need for daily repentance and contrition. He is also increasingly appreciative of the truth that he lives and he survives by the grace of God expressed in the forgiveness of sins.

Justification then is a reckoning, an imputing of righteousness to the sinner on account of Christ's merits. This is emphasized especially in Romans 4:5,6; 4:24; 5:19, Philippians 3:9 and numerous other passages of Scripture. God does this by grace alone, as Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 4:16 express so tacitly. It is a judicial sentence of God based on the work of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24; Romans 5:8,9; Galatians 3:13; 1 Cor.1:30 and other passages). And the condition for reception is faith, which again, is not a human achievement, a kind of work of righteousness, but is itself a gift of God (Romans 3:22; 4:11,13; 9:30; Gal.2:16).

Sanctification, in the sense that we shall use it tonight, is sanctification in the narrower sense of the word. I realize that there is a sense of the whole territory of God's work by which He draws us out of our death in sin into the life of fellowship with Him can be called in a single all-embracing term, the work of sanctification. But sanctification in the narrower sense of the word which is commonly used by church theologians when they are talking of sanctification, is the new life in Christ Jesus. It follows upon justification as its inseparable outcome. It takes place in the regenerate man who in his justification is brought into a living fellowship with his Lord and God. On account of his justification by faith, regenerate man becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit who through the Word of God empowers him to serve God with a life of love and obedience.

Faith which in that initial matter of justification is the open door, the passive reception of all that God has done, for our redemption in Christ Jesus is here in this consequent matter of sanctification, the dynamic and creative power which motivates a man to serve God. Faith can only be such a dynamic creative power, producing good deeds of service to God because as justifying faith, it has first passively received the grace of God. The Scriptures always show sanctification to be the outcome of justification. It is never the proof of justification, far less the pre-condition of justification. It is always seen in the New Testament as fruit of justification. St. Paul in the relevant chapter 6 of his letter to the Romans says, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification." "And having been set free from sin (again in the realm of justification) you have become slaves of righteousness, so now yield your members servants of righteousness, for sanctification." As the formula of Concord puts it (which the Lutheran fathers drew up in 1580 after a great deal of disputes with the synogists and with the Majorists)

"When a person is justified, he is also renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, from which renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works must then follow."

Sanctification is sometimes referred to as renewal. To describe the activity of the new nature of man in contrast with the old and to give expression to the fact that sanctification is a continuing process in which the exhausted servant of God who has been liberated from his slavery to sin is repeatedly refreshed and restored and revitalised by the Spirit through the Word. Sanctification by contrast with justification manifests itself in deeds of goodness, in the constant battle against sin, in the constant endeavour to perform life in accordance with the will of God in the constant return in prayer and in worshipful meditation to the source of all vitality for Christian living, namely Jesus Christ Himself, the living Vine, the Bread from heaven.

The epistle to Titus says, "For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation for all men," (here again the realm for justification) "training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world awaiting our blessed hope." And Paul in his letter to the Romans having expounded his doctrine of justification by faith in those first chapters, begins the closing section of his epistle in typical fashion with an examination of the outcome of all this in the life of the justified sinner. He says, "I appeal to you, therefore,..." (this is the connecting conjunction which connects all that he has said before about justification with all now that follows as the working out of this justification in the life of the sinner), "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, wholly and acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service." Romans 12:1. That this capacity for service is not man's achievement, but is a gift of God, is amply emphasized by St. Paul in Galatians 2:19,20 - "Through the law I died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." A similar thrust is given in Christ's own words in John 15:5 - "I am the vine. You are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit for apart from me, you can do nothing." However, the God who thus empowers man now uses man and all his peculiarities and all his gifts which have been divinely apportioned to him, as His co-labourers. Such is the condescension of God. Such is the dignity of the new life in Christ.

While there can be no sanctification without justification, and while justification gives root to the sanctified life, we cannot mingle and stew them together (to quote Luther). Justification must always take first place. It is related to sanctification as has been ably said by Adolf Koberle in his book, The Quest for Holiness, "It is related to sanctification as creation is to preservation, as birth is to growth." Justification is instantaneous, absolutely valid, complete and possessing the character of a final decision as eternally determines our whole existence with a majestic and unchangeable actuality. Sanctification is something growing, not a being, but a becoming, not a receiving, but an increasing, not a state but a movement. The decree of justification establishes a new relationship between God and man. The spiritual gift of sanctification introduces a new vitality. The first is an act of divine compassion, the second is the beginning of divine training. So without detracting in any way from the divine reality, and the divine power of sanctification, we can truly say that justification complete in itself, sanctification is always something incomplete. Because also the justified man is still a sinner, he will see in his sanctified life the marks and the stains of sin and imperfection. With St. Paul

he will have to say again and again, "The good that I would, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do." His life in the Spirit will be a constant wrestling with the flesh. He is a Christian soldier. There is a constant mortification of the body, a constant fainting and falling in spite of his prayers and his use of the sword of the Spirit. So often in our pastoral work we get these people who are disturbed by the fact that though they are really children of God and really study His Word and really bow their heads in fervent and constant prayer, are nonetheless disrupted and have their faith assaulted by the fact that they again and again fail to reach the divine ideal; but more importantly I think, are seeing more clearly because of their familiarity with the Word of God that even their goodness is itself stained and incomplete and imperfect in the sight of God. Whereas they might have quite serenely on the other side of justification, gone through life believing that they were quite all right, that they were measuring up to the standards that they had set for themselves: After their justification, when they have lived with the Word of God, when they are living in fellowship with Jesus Christ, their own wretchedness seems to stand out in more stark and more disturbing colours. There is this fainting and falling in spite of prayer, and in spite of the use of the sword of the Spirit. But the great thing is that out of his repeated failures, out of his disturbed view of himself, which seem to increase in magnitude with his growth in grace, and knowledge of his Lord, and which seem to accuse him with greater ferocity as he nears the day of accounting, he can look to that justification which he knows is his by faith, and which encompasses him about on every side, and looking at that justification, he can be reassured that in Christ Jesus his sins are atoned for and forgiven and his salvation is sure.

Chairman:

Thank you Pastor Renner. Mr. Brinsmead will now take up the subject.

Robert D. Brinsmead:

A church historian has observed that the whole history of the Protestant movement has been a continual effort to get justification and sanctification in proper tension. Or as another has said, -

"If you preach too much believe  
People live as they please;  
If you preach too much law,  
They go out the door."

Actually the problem can never be solved by abstract theology. There is need for good theology, but that is not enough. The period of Protestant Orthodoxy that followed the Reformers was a period that produced some very great theology and much definition and re-definition in the area of justification and sanctification. But that period produced a very dead church.

The apostle Paul was the greatest theologian, but he did not turn the world upside-down by itinerating about giving theological lectures. He knew by his experience on Mars Hill that reasoned theological discourses do not hit a man in the centre of his being. He preached the moving, personal message of the cross - Christ and Him crucified. Only in the light of the cross will we ever see justification and sanctification in correct tension.

God has a government. He rules the universe with the universal law of love. Now love is a combination of two principles - justice and mercy. These are the foundation pillars of God's throne. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne; mercy and truth go before Thy face." Psalm 89:14.

Justice means equity, impartiality, and the unerring application of inexorable law. Mercy means compassion, pity and forgiveness.

When man sinned, it appeared that God was in an impossible situation. How could He deal with man in justice and mercy? Justice means to treat man as he deserves. Mercy means to treat him better than he deserves. If God forgave (which His yearning compassion demanded), would He not compromise His justice? If He executed the sinner (which the justice of His law demanded), would He not fail to satisfy mercy?

The only way God could reconcile the prerogatives of justice and mercy was by His own infinite humiliation. What a wonder to realize that the throne of God is undergirded by His eternal, and infinite self-sacrifice!

In the person of His Son the Almighty came to this world, because His love called Him that way. The Possessor of all things emptied Himself. Though rich, for our sakes He became poor that through His poverty we might be made rich. Innocent, He stooped to bear the guilt of the sinner. This Lord of all became servant of all; this Judge of all, the judged of all.

As our Substitute He must endure the justice of the law. He must be treated as we deserve. Thus He was reckoned not worthy to be born, but in a donkey's food box. He never owned a home, He had not where to lay His head because He, our Substitute, was judged unworthy of all those things we think we deserve. "He was despised, and we esteemed Him not," because we don't deserve respect.

Yet in this lowest place of a humble servant, this Prince of glory hid His divinity with our humanity, and in that humanity, maintained the purity of His divine nature. He was filled "with all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Col.2:9. The infinite righteousness of divine perfection was put on display in Jesus to the amazement of the heavenly universe. As our Substitute He rendered to the law and to His Father a life that equalled the broadest demands of an infinite law. This life was infinitely superior to Adam's sinless life, infinitely superior to any angel life. On our behalf He gave to God everything that justice required in filial love: humble obedience and reverential awe. As our Substitute He received from God everything that we should receive, but are not able - all the fullness of the Divine Spirit in infinite plentitude.

But even the unspeakable wonder of this active obedience was not enough. Justice demanded that the sinner die. The burden and horror of the world's sin rolled on the divine soul of the Redeemer like a great mountain to shut out from His view the light of God's sustaining presence. He sweat great drops of blood in agony beyond human computation. He was captured like a wild beast by night, hurried off and arraigned before corrupt courts (do we even merit a decent trial?), twice before the priests, twice before Pilate, once before Herod. He was mocked, defamed, beaten, and spat upon. Barabbas was declared a very saint in contrast to Him. He was called Beelzebub - King of the dung-hills.

He was suspended between heaven and earth, for heaven forsook Him and earth disowned Him! He was crucified between

two thieves because He was reckoned the greatest sinner of all - and so He was in the awful reckoning of God. As Moses lifted up the likeness of a snake in the wilderness, the Son of Man was lifted up, reckoned as a venomous poisonous snake. Thus did He become sin for us, who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Men considered no cruelty too great for Him to bear, no insult too much to heap upon Him, no shame too deep for Him to endure. The pain would not have been so great if He did not love these unfeeling men who gathered around to mock His sorrow. He loved them, and the more they hated Him, the stronger became His love for them. The mystery of human sin is that they hated Him "without a cause" (John 15:25). The greater mystery is that He loved them without a cause. He suffered much because He loved much. He suffered in proportion to His love.

But beyond and above all the suffering caused by men's rejection of His love, was the awful horror of Divine rejection. God hid His face. No favour could be shown Him; no comfort of God's presence. He must die utterly rejected. So the darkness of eternal night gathered around His suffering soul until the unspeakable bitterness and shame of human sin forced from His parched lips the awful cry, "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken Me?" His were the sufferings of a God - infinite sufferings. His was the humiliation of a God. He went lower and lower until there was no lower place for Him to go. But He willingly gave His life of infinite worth to satisfy the demands of God's righteous law.

When Christ expired, justice was satisfied. Our sins were punished in Christ. He exhausted the penalty. But not only was justice satisfied, mercy was satisfied. Christ provided a pardon for the race. At the cross divine justice forgave the race. "If one died for all", says the apostle, "then were all dead." 2 Cor. 5:14. As if to say, since the Substitute has died, it is the same as if all had died, all had paid the penalty, and all were forgiven and set free. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead proves that the atonement has been made, that in Christ the human race has been restored to the favour of God. Thus it was "He was raised again on account of our justification." Romans 4:25 N.E.B. margin.

Thus did justice and mercy meet and kiss at Calvary (Psalm 85:10). Justice did not cancel out mercy, nor mercy cancel out justice. Each held its place and the government of God was made eternally secure.

Now God could be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Now He could be merciful and the destroyer of him who believes not but continues in sin.

Let us now see how both justification and sanctification appear in the light of the cross.

### Justification

Jesus hanging on the cross is our justification. All this it took to secure our acceptance with God. And nothing less than this inestimable price does it require to maintain our right standing in God's sight. When we see something of what it took to fully satisfy the law for us, we will shrink from our foolish ideas about His fully satisfying the demands of the law in us. Atonement was such an awesome and infinite thing that it could only be made outside of us in Christ. It cannot be reduced to the dimensions of a finite, intra-human experience.

In this light of the cross we must reject all these distortions of sanctification:

1. In sanctification our state will never reach the standing we have in justification.
2. Justification is the ultimate gift. There is nothing greater. In it God gives all. Sanctification must never be viewed as receiving something more, or worse still, something superior. The grace of justification is like the ocean. Sanctification is like the little shell holding some of the water which overwhelmingly surrounds it.
3. Justification is not just an initiating step that is superseded by "the higher life" of sanctification. The justified sinner at the foot of the cross has reached the highest point to which a man can attain.
4. Justification is always primary. As Adolf Koberle says in the English translation from the German of In Quest for Holiness;

"In the first place justification always remains the moral basis that makes sanctification possible... And in the second place, the grace that is above us always remains greater than the grace that is within us. The pardon which faith receives is something entire, perfect, rounded out, complete, which neither requires nor is capable of enlargement. On the other hand, the new creation which faith experiences through its communion with Christ always remains a fragmentary and progressive work... the correct and inner succession and inner superiority of the one gift over the other must be clearly preserved." p.ix.

"...justification, as the moral condition which is essential in God's sight for the new life, must always be given the first place." p. 96.

"This is what is so deceptive and unevangelical in every sort of teaching concerning sanctification that would attempt in some way to reach a point in which the communion with God no longer depends completely on the gift of justification..." p. 97.

5. Our standing and fellowship with God must be grounded, as Calvin says, on forgiveness of sins and not on our renewal or sanctification.
6. Imputed and imparted righteousness does not have equal merit with justification. (I'm using merit in the theological sense). Merit remains with and inseparable from the person of Christ. Therefore merit is wholly imputed. Which is to say, the holy doing and dying of Jesus is our only merit.
7. Through sanctification we are not called upon to satisfy the demands of God's law except on a human horizontal level. It took nothing less than Calvary to fulfill all righteousness for us. We cannot equal the Pattern. As the believer walks in the light of the cross he will always consider that what Jesus has done and suffered is his only righteousness. Thus will the main focus of attention be upon Christ's experience rather than upon Christian experience.

### Sanctification

Will the teaching of full acceptance through what Jesus has already done lead people to say, "Christ has done it all. There is no need for me to do anything?" Not if the cross is truly presented. Consider -

1. Grace is free. It costs us nothing, but it has cost God everything. I do not believe the sinner can reach out with one hand to accept the pardon in the wounds of Jesus Christ, and at the same time smite Him with the fist of sin with the other hand. And can the repentant sinner who sings,

"O depth of mercy, how can it be,  
The gate was left ajar for me,"

go out and carouse upon God's merciful reckoning? Mary loved Jesus much because she was forgiven much. Perhaps Martha thought she needed some pep talks on sanctification, but the soul who looks to Christ's doing and dying cannot be sluggish in doing the Lord's will. Someone has well said, "Luther's theology rests primarily on thankful certainty, and out of it flows the duty of keeping the commandments."

2. Yet we cannot say that sanctification merely rests on what one writer has called "the slender thread of thankfulness." Since the flesh is still with us, we need also to be motivated by obligation, a trembling at God's Word and a fear of His displeasure. As the view of God's mercy in the light of the cross shall warn our hearts for service, so the view of the terrible justice of God shall warn our hearts to service. The cross tells us of God's abhorrence of evil. He will not connive at sin. He who spared not His own Son will not spare him who looks upon the call to holy living with indifference. And because Christ died and rose for all, there shall be a judgment for all (Acts 17:31). Not just the wicked will be judged, but as Jesus and the apostles plainly teach, the Lord will call His servants to account (Luke 19:11-26; Matt. 16:24-27; Matt. 25:32; 12:36; 22:11; 1 Cor. 4:3; 3:13; 6:9; etc.). As a follower of Luther's message has said:

"All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the final judgment on this earthly life. Whoever in the earthly congregation continues to serve evil shall not inherit the Kingdom... when the idea of judgment on the entire earthly attitude of the one who is justified has been maintained, there will be no room for the ancient antinomian misunderstanding which has always accompanied Paulinism and Lutheranism like a dark shadow... If even the justified sinner must face the judgment it is no longer a matter of indifference as to the degree in which he has allowed himself to be purified by the Spirit from the 'defilement and evil of the flesh.'" Quest for Holiness, p.166.

Thus does the mercy of God cause us to say, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." And the justice of God prevents us from saying "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound."

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