

SANCTIFICATION AND JUSTIFICATION: A UNITY OF DISTINCTIONS

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The task at hand is to relate justification (being declared righteous) to a biblical understanding of sanctification (being made righteous). When God declares a sinner as righteous, the action begins with His own character and is accomplished by His own action. All His ways are perfect, just, and upright, qualities that stem from His holiness. His redemptive acts, including His justification of sinners, are marked by His love as exemplified in Rom 8:31-39. Justification is a declaration by God of the sinner's status before Himself, imputing to him the righteousness of Christ through faith. Holiness is the key concept of sanctification as seen in the consistent biblical emphasis on God's people being a holy people. Positional sanctification is a determination by God that a sinner is set apart as a member of God's holy people. Progressive sanctification speaks of a growth in practical holiness when believers obey God's command to grow in Christlikeness. Understanding the correct relationship between justification and progressive sanctification is important: sanctification does not cause justification and justification does not cause sanctification. Yet there is great importance in seeing that the two arise from the same soteriological reality of Christ's substitutionary atonement and the resultant union of the believer with Christ.

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Introduction

The doctrine of justification has been the topic of a tsunami of literature in recent decades. There are “new” and “fresh” perspectives, and yet still many who seek to defend the traditional Reformation formulation. The famous words of Luther (it is “the article of the standing or falling of the church”) and Calvin (it is “the main hinge on which religion turns”) have become aphorisms of the traditional view. The dizzying array of arguments and counterproposals can seem impenetrable to the

uninitiated.¹ Indeed, one could be forgiven for wanting to skip past yet another article on this well-traversed subject.

However, the following study will not enter into that discussion. Rather, it will be its task to relate justification (according to the “old” perspective) to a biblical understanding of sanctification, a topic which has had less direct treatment of late, as attention has turned to related matters of “spirituality” or “spiritual formation.”²

Since the reformers first carefully distinguished between being declared righteous and being made righteous, comparing and contrasting justification and sanctification has been considered a key element in expressing the gospel faithfully. This can be seen particularly in Calvin, who considered this distinction at some length.³

This study, after first summarizing the basics of justification and sanctification, will seek to avoid two extremes in relating these key doctrinal themes. First is the tendency to conflate them so that they are nearly identified—the idea that sanctification causes justification or growth therein, or the less serious error of seeing justification as the cause of sanctification. The second and opposite error is to separate them so widely that their soteriological connection is asserted barely and without adequate theological argument. Such misses a key biblical principle. Capitalizing on an array of biblical texts and Calvin’s concept of “twofold grace” will show that justification and sanctification are distinct aspects of the gift of salvation related to each other because they both flow from the atonement and a believer’s union with Christ.

Justification: The Basics

Justification is a legal term that is used in the NT to describe how a sinner

¹Peter Toon projected in 1983 that “what is likely to happen in the near future is a general consensus among biblical scholars of all kinds as to the meaning of righteousness and justification in the Bible, especially in the Pauline letters” (Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* [Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1983] 140). The intervening years have shown his well-intentioned and enviable optimism to be profoundly misplaced.

²Literature in this field is even more diffuse than on justification. Though it will not be the goal of this study to sort out “spirituality” from “spiritual formation” and relate both to sanctification, that would be a worthwhile effort. Brian Colmery has made some strides in this direction (“True Spirituality: In Pursuit of an Evangelical Spiritual Theology” [Th.M. thesis, The Master’s Seminary, 2010]).

³Key discussions of this point in Calvin’s soteriology include Cornelis P. Venema, “Calvin’s Understanding of the ‘Twofold Grace of God’ and Contemporary Ecumenical Discussion of the Gospel,” *MJT* 18 (2007):67-105; Jonathan Rainbow, “Double Grace: John Calvin’s View of the Relationship of Justification and Sanctification,” *Ex Auditu* 5 (1999):99-105; and Anthony N. S. Lane, “Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification?” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004):205-24.

is made acceptable to God.⁴ In salvation, God declares a sinner to be righteous—a consideration that begins in His own character and is accomplished by His own action.

Where It Starts: the Character of God

It is not unusual to begin a discussion of justification with sin—the problem that justification is intended to overcome.⁵ This is certainly not inappropriate, but since justification is an act of God, it seems at least as appropriate to begin the discussion with the attributes of God which motivate this action. For when considering any of God’s actions, it is important to take seriously the principle that all of God’s acts flow first of all from His purposes and His character.

First, since justification involves declaring a sinner to be right with God (i.e., righteous) and therefore acceptable to Him, justification is an act performed by a righteous and just God. Repeatedly in the OT, God is honored as the one who is entirely and quintessentially righteous. This means that all his ways are perfect, just, faithful, and upright (Deut 32:4; Ps 145:17).

Another approach is to see God’s ethical righteousness as the outworking of His holiness.⁶ Because God is wholly other, His actions manifest the otherness of His being as absolute moral purity. Strong puts it as follows:

Holiness in God must, consequently, be defined as conformity to his own perfect nature. The only rule for divine will is divine reason; and divine reason prescribes everything that it is befitting an infinite being to do. God is not under law or above law—he is law. He is righteous by nature and of necessity.⁷

Or, as Culver has more recently expressed it, “The righteousness by which God orders His world is neither something created, external to Himself, nor something

⁴As noted above, the purpose of this article is not to defend assertions such as this against the more recent formulations of justification. Although the discussion continues, this writer considers such formulations to have been substantially answered in such varied works as D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001 and 2004); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2004); John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), and others.

⁵A recent example is Guy Prentiss Waters, “Justification Defined,” *Churchman* 123/1 (Spring 2009):67-81. See also Bruce Demarest’s similar starting point in *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1997) 362-63.

⁶For example, A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium*, 3 vols. in one (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1907) 272; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed., ed. Alan W. Gomes (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 2003) 290-92.

⁷Strong, *Dogmatic* 291. [Andy, should this be Shedd instead of Strong?]

other than God Himself in any manner whatsoever. His righteous acts are His character in action; God is law unto Himself.”⁸ So God is righteous in that everything He thinks, says, and does, and is perfectly consistent with His own character—for “he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:13).⁹

The rendering of consistent and sound justice is also a key aspect of God’s righteousness—God always treats others rightly. As the rightful Sovereign of the world, “righteousness and justice are the foundation of [his] throne” (Ps 89:14; cf. Ps 119:137-8). This is the normative side of God’s righteousness—His character is not just the standard for His own thoughts and actions, but is also the yardstick for all His moral creatures. This principle is found in its simplest and most explicit form in the command, “Be holy for I am holy” (Lev 11:44), an imperative that is emphatically reiterated for the church in 1 Pet 1:15-16.

God’s own righteousness, then, is the standard for all God’s moral creatures. And because YHWH himself is righteous, He loves expressions of this uprightness and moral rectitude in the attitudes and actions of his creatures. The psalmist says that YHWH “is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face” (Ps 11:7). The problem for humankind, of course, is that “there is no one who does good” (Ps 14:1), not even a single person (Rom 3:10-12).

So God, who is perfectly righteous in all that He is and does, desires that His moral creatures reflect this righteousness back to Him in their lives. But they are utterly unrighteous and cannot do this. At this point it could be said that justification is not necessarily called for—a God who is essentially committed to perfect justice because of His righteousness could simply execute the judgment that creaturely unrighteousness merits: death (Rom 6:23a). Instead, another of God’s attributes is expressed alongside (and in perfect harmony with) His righteousness in order to provide a better solution: His love also motivates justification.

Throughout Scripture God’s love is portrayed as a motivation for His redemptive acts. God chose Israel simply by setting His affections on them (Deut 7:7; 10:14-15), and despite their many wanderings, He continued to love them in covenant faithfulness (e.g., Hos 11:1-9; Mal 3:1-12). The NT portrays this redemptive love as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God (John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:9).

Though simply stating the broad biblical truth of God’s love as a motivation for His saving acts in history is enough, a theological step further would relate His redeeming love directly to the doctrine of justification. This connection is evident in how Scripture connects God’s righteousness with His omnibenevolence.

Exodus 34 presents one of the key moments in redemptive history, a

⁸Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical & Historical* (Fearn, Rosshire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2005) 99.

⁹Unless otherwise noted, all English Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

moment where God speaks directly about His attributes in order to reveal the motives for His actions. In the wake of the golden calf incident and the subsequent punishment through the sword and divine action (Exodus 32), God announces that He will keep His promise to give Israel their new land, but will not accompany them in a personal manifestation of His presence (33:1-3). Moses goes to the tent of meeting to plead for understanding (v. 13) and for God's personal presence with His chosen nation (v. 15). Finally, Moses presents His climactic request: "I pray You, show me your glory" (v. 18).

God's answer to this request is a personal revelation of His attributes just prior to His renewal of the covenant with Israel (34:6ff.). This divine self-revelation in turn forms the basis for the OT understanding of the character of God, as is demonstrated by its repeated deployment across the chronological and canonical scope of the OT (Num 14:18; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Nah 1:3; Neh 9:17). It is a declaration of the character of God that "carries almost creedal force."¹⁰

The relationship of God's love to justification is implicit in YHWH's self-disclosure. Of the six attributes he lists, the first five are various expressions of His love: compassionate, gracious, patient, generous in merciful covenant faithfulness,¹¹ and forgiving. The last of the list could be called righteousness or justice: even though YHWH is eminently loving, patient, and forgiving, He does not leave guilt unpunished. This leaves a tension in God's self-revelation: how can He be forgiving if he is unremittably just?

The answer, of course, is the fully-developed NT doctrine of justification. No NT passage that explicitly ties God's love to his acts of justification, but the two are closely associated in multiple contexts, two of which will be mentioned here. The first and clearest is Rom 8:31-39. As Paul draws this section of his letter to a close, he speaks of his certainty that God can and will bring His plan of redemption to completion. He formulates this as a series of rhetorical questions: "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (v. 31), "who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" (v. 33), and, climactically, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v. 35). The matter is summed up in terms of this final question—absolutely nothing can separate the believer from "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39). So God's forgiving, justifying work is expressed by Paul as God's love in Christ.

Another place where Paul implies God's love as a motivation for justification is Rom 3:21-26. As he is explaining how justification is by faith in

¹⁰John D. Currid, *Exodus* (Auburn, Mass.: Evangelical Press USA, 2001) 2:309.

¹¹The phrase "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness; keeping steadfast love for thousands" seems to be an extended affirmation of YHWH's extensive *hesed* rather than an affirmation of two different attributes (*hesed* and *emet*). Dividing the phrase into two attributes seems to add nothing to the interpretation (see e.g., Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006] 716).

Christ, Paul says that justification comes “by his grace as a gift” (v. 24). But such a gift could give the impression that God is simply overlooking sin, so Paul explains that this is why God put forward Jesus “as a propitiation by his blood” (v. 25). In previous times the Father “could tolerate the sin of human beings only because he looked forward to the death of his Son as an atonement for sin. . . . God’s righteousness has been vindicated in the death of Jesus. These comments by Paul demonstrate that the question he asked was not, how can God justly punish human beings, but rather, how can God justly forgive anyone?”¹²

This points to the gracious intention of God’s omnibenevolence: God is by nature loving and forgiving, and Paul feels that he must explicitly show how this gracious disposition harmonizes with His righteousness. In other words, God cannot be a “justifier” if He is not also “just” in doing so. His conclusion in verse 26 (“that he might be just and the justifier”) demonstrates this harmony: the requirements of God’s righteous character are met in Christ’s sacrifice.¹³

It is important to see that justification flows from the character and purposes of God as a manifestation of His goodness and love as well as His righteousness. Because the debates on the nature of justification tend to focus on legal conceptualities (imputation vs. impartation, what it does rather than who does it), it is easy to forget the fire of God’s love from which the heat of justification arises.

What It Is: A Declaration by God

Because of the astonishing volume of literature that seeks to define justification, and because the present purpose is simply to reiterate the basics, the next step in the study will be rather brief. Justification is a declaration by God concerning the sinner’s status before God.

First, justification is a forensic declaration. The forensic element in justification is clear in Scripture and well-noted in the Christian tradition. In the OT the verb *šdq* conveys the idea, as in Deut 25:1, where the judge’s job is to “decide between [two disputing parties], acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty.”¹⁴ Accordingly, a repeated warning is issued in the OT against convicting the

¹²Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 198; cf. his discussion of this passage alongside 2 Cor 5:21 in idem, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001) 201-3.

¹³Other passages that associate justification and God’s love in Christ include Rom 5:8-9 and Titus 3:4-7. In fact, the latter context appears to apply the divine attributes of Exod 34:6-7 to Jesus Himself, with the resolution of God’s love and righteousness found explicitly in the truth of justification.

¹⁴This passage is frequently cited as portraying a definitive element in the meaning of justification. See e.g., Reimer, *NIDOTTE* 3:750; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (1965; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 254; Packer, “Justification” 593; Demarest, *Cross* 365.

innocent and acquitting the guilty (e.g., Isa 5:23; Prov 17:15).

The corresponding NT verb, *dikaioō*, contains the same idea, perhaps most explicitly in the aforementioned instance of Rom 8:33-34, where the opposite of *dikaioō* is *katakrinō*—to condemn: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” In sum, the legal semantic environment of justification in both OT and NT brought Morris to the “conviction that the basic idea is one of acquittal.”¹⁵

As a forensic declaration, then, justification is a pronouncement made concerning the status of a person’s relationship to a particular legal standard. One is either in compliance with the standard (“innocent”) or not (“guilty”). The standard in justification, of course, is the law of God, which in turn is an expression of God’s own righteous character. Justification is God’s declaration that the sinner is held to be in accord with God’s own righteousness (more on this below).

Finally, justification is portrayed in Scripture as an accomplished fact. It is not a process that requires cooperation and enhancement, but rather is an action of God that is viewed as complete. This is seen clearly in Paul’s use of *dikaioō* in passages such as Rom 5:1, where the aorist passive participle is used: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. the “now” in Rom 3:21). Because justification has been accomplished, Paul can talk about the key enduring benefit of this divine action—peace with God. Eight verses later the same construction appears, reinforcing the view that Paul sees justification as a definitive accomplishment of God, completed by means of a declaration concerning the sinner’s standing before God and His righteous law.¹⁶

How It Works: Divine Imputation

Justification is a matter of imputation: God regards the sinner to be something that in his actual experience he is not—righteous. This gives rise to the old objection that if justification is viewed as an imputation, it constitutes a legal fiction, which is an impossibility for a truth-telling God. But the objection misses the point that God is rendering a ruling on the sinner’s behalf because of the work of

¹⁵Morris, *Apostolic Preaching* 260. See also Anthony N. S. Lane, “Justification by Faith,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 416, who also helpfully recalls that although justification is a forensic concept, “[T]his does not mean that our relationship to God can be reduced to legal terms but rather that such terms provide one important way among others of describing the salvation that we have in Christ.”

¹⁶This is not to deny that believers “eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal 5:5), implying a completion of God’s work of justification in the eschaton. Far from casting doubt on the certainty or completeness of God’s justifying action, Paul’s statement here shows that “righteousness is an end-time gift, a verdict from the day of judgment, which has now been pronounced in the lives of believers on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (Schreiner, *Paul* 208).

someone else. Thus, in order to understand justification one must see that it is rooted in substitution.¹⁷

Justification is possible only because a substitute has been provided. The basis for God's declaration of righteousness is the righteous substitute, Jesus Christ. The OT looks forward to this role of the Messiah specifically. In Isaiah 53 the Servant will bear the sins of many (v. 6) and suffer unjustly, yet willingly like a sacrificial lamb (vv. 7-9). In YHWH's plan, this suffering will count as a sin offering (v. 10) and the result is that many will "be accounted righteous" (v. 11).

In the NT, Peter makes the connection implicitly yet clearly between substitution and justification when he describes the cross-work of Christ by saying in 1 Pet 3:18 that He "suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous [*dikaïos huper adikōn*], to bring us to God." Here we have the language of righteousness and substitutionary atonement together. The righteous one took the place of the unrighteous. His suffering "was the penalty due to the sins of the unrighteous that He bore in their stead, or the propitiation necessary for their sins that He offered on their behalf."¹⁸ The dependence of justification on substitution cannot be overstated and will be seen in the background of most of what follows.

Specifically, then, how is imputation involved in the declaring of a sinner righteous? This is best expressed from two perspectives: forgiveness and imputed righteousness. The first of these gathers up and summarizes much of what has been said so far: justification first of all involves forgiveness of sins—or, in forensic (and rather inelegant) terms, the non-imputation of sin. The sinner moves from "guilty" before the bar of the Divine Judge to "not guilty" or "in full compliance."

Besides the language of courtroom acquittal already delineated, accounting terminology is used to describe what God does for the sinner in his act of justification. This language of "crediting" is used to express both aspects of justification under consideration here. Paul employs David's description in Ps 32:1-2 of one of the blessings of justification. In this text, one whose "lawless deeds are forgiven" (Rom 4:7) is the person "against whom the Lord will not count his sin" (v. 8). In context, this is what it means to be justified—God no longer counts those sins against the sinner, i.e., He forgives them.¹⁹

¹⁷Morris shows this relationship in his classic work, but he makes the point in just a few paragraphs at the end of his extensive study of justification (Morris, *Apostolic Preaching* 296-98). Demarest brings it out a bit more directly (Demarest, *Cross* 368-70).

¹⁸Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, TNTC (1959; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 141. Here, of course, *hyper* + genitive construction indicates not only representation but also substitution (cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 383-89).

¹⁹Paul uses *logizomai* again in 2 Cor 5:19, where the concept of "not counting trespasses against" serves as a synonym for forgiveness that results in reconciliation with God.

Combined with other contexts in which justification is described in terms of deliverance from sins (Rom 3:21-26, where the issue is sin being propitiated; 5:1-11, where the emphasis is that justification through Christ's death brings peace between God and his enemies; 8:31-34, where release from condemnation is the point), it is clear that justification is about overcoming the problem of sin.

But this is not the whole picture. Paul speaks of justification not only as the non-imputation of sin but also as the imputation of righteousness. Specifically, he describes justification as the sinner being credited with the righteousness of God in Christ.²⁰ He uses the same accounting terminology (*logizomai*) in Rom 4:3, 5, 6, 9 to assert that justification involves righteousness being credited to a sinner.²¹ In Phil 3:9 Paul speaks of this righteousness very specifically as coming from God (*ek theou*) and not from works of the Law.²² And in Rom 5:17 righteousness comes to the sinner as a gift (*dōreas*) from God. What this means is that the justified sinner is accounted, regarded, accepted, as righteous before God the Righteous Judge.

But again the specter of “legal fiction” arises—how can God accept as righteous those who clearly are not? To answer this question, the principle of substitution is important in observing how it appears in Paul's doctrine of imputed righteousness. This is most explicit in Paul's statement of the truth that the Father “made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21 NET). God is able to account sinners as righteous because they are represented before Him by Jesus, who functions as a substitute for them (*hyper hēmōn*).

This application of the principle of substitution appears throughout Paul's writings in the doctrine of union with Christ. Imputed righteousness in justification means that because the justified sinner has been united to his Substitute, the Father regards that Substitute's righteousness as belonging to the justified one. In other words, “we...become the righteousness of God in Him.” This link is made throughout most of the passages already cited with regard to non-imputation of sin and imputation of righteousness—the justified sinner is justified only because he is

²⁰ Again, the present purpose is not to engage the recent discussion on imputed righteousness. For a helpful defense of this important concept, see Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields,” in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004):46-80.

²¹ For an excellent yet concise discussion of whether faith constitutes the righteousness credited to the sinner in justification, see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. in 1, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 353-59.

²² Romans 10:3 serves as a partial parallel here, contrasting righteousness a sinner's own attempts at righteousness with God's righteousness.

“in Christ.”²³ Indeed, whenever justification is discussed, union with Christ is not far away in the context. “For Paul union with Christ is not fancy but fact—the basic fact, indeed, in Christianity; and the doctrine of imputed righteousness is simply Paul’s exposition of the forensic aspect of it.”²⁴ Carson agrees when he says that the theme of union with Christ rightly understood is a comprehensive and complex way of portraying the various ways in which we are identified with Christ and He with us. In its connections with justification, “union with Christ” terminology . . . suggests that although justification cannot be reduced to imputation, justification in Paul’s thought cannot long be faithfully maintained without it.²⁵

To summarize, then, justification is a declaration by God in which the sinner is forgiven and receives an “alien righteousness,” the righteousness of Christ.

What It Brings About: Peace with God

Several of the passages cited in this study so far describe the specific effects that justification brings about, and it is important to summarize those to complete this basic sketch of the doctrine in order to compare and contrast it with sanctification.

First, being declared righteous before God brings reconciliation between God and the sinner. This is Paul’s heading for Romans 5 as he transitions from the discussion of justification in the previous chapter: it is because Christians are justified that they have peace with God through Christ. Reconciliation is also the theme of 2 Cor 5:18-21. It has already been noted that this context contains both negative imputation (“not counting their trespasses against them,” v. 19) and positive imputation (“that we might become the righteousness of God in Him,” v. 21). Although the verb *dikaiōō* is not used, the passage is assuredly about justification. And the point is driven home as a plea: Because Christ has laid the foundation for reconciliation (v. 18), “we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (v. 20). Justification removes the enmity between God and the sinner.

Second, and related to reconciliation, justification brings salvation from divine wrath. Romans 5:9 links the two explicitly: “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of

²³This point helps take much of the energy out of the “imputation vs. impartation” debate. If believers become the righteousness of God in Christ, the righteousness clearly is inherent in Him, not them, so what they receive is a status of righteousness. “When we have grasped the fact that the righteous are those accepted by God, some of the controversy concerning imputed and imparted righteousness seems beside the point. What difference does it make whether we impute or impart a status?” (Morris, *Apostolic Preaching* 271-72, emphasis in the original).

²⁴J. I. Packer, *EDT* 596.

²⁵D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation” 77.

God.” No one who has been declared to have a right standing with God must fear divine wrath, for “if the obstacle of our sin has already been removed so that we now stand not guilty before him, then we can be confident that we shall be saved through Christ from God’s wrath.”²⁶ Moreover, because the *dikaioōthentes* (carried forward from 5:1) shows that this justification is an accomplished fact, “those who have been pronounced righteous by God can rejoice already in their deliverance from His wrath.”²⁷

Finally, justification qualifies one for eternal life. Of course, this is implied in the two previous results of justification—one who is at peace with God and saved from his eschatological wrath is one who partakes of God’s eternal favor. However, Paul makes this more explicit in Titus 3:7. Paul extols the Trinitarian truth of salvation by grace in vv. 4-6, then speaks of the purpose of this salvation in terms of justification. “[S]o that being justified [aor. pass. ptc. *dikaioō*] by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Paul says that salvation, particularly identified as being declared righteous, grants one the blessing of inheriting eternal life.²⁸

Summary

Justification, then, is God’s own action, a forensic-type declaration concerning a sinner’s relationship to God’s own standard of righteousness. It is based on the redemptive work of Christ alone and is appropriated only by faith.²⁹

A more detailed theological narration of justification would go like this: God, who is righteous in Himself and is the normative standard of righteousness, lovingly provides His Son as a substitute for unrighteous sinners so that they can be made acceptable to Him. This substitute lives a sinless life in obedience to the Father, qualifying Himself to be the perfect sacrifice and high priest on behalf of sinners. Offering Himself as the spotless Lamb of God, He is put forward by the Father as the propitiating sacrifice which is made available to sinners who may appropriate this sacrifice for themselves in faith. Upon exercise of this faith, they are united to the Son by the Father so completely that He considers the Son’s efficacious death to be that of those who actually deserved it. The result is that the Father, the God who is righteous, sees those sinners as having His own righteousness, because

²⁶Schreiner, *Romans* 263.

²⁷F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 124.

²⁸The ambiguity of the grammatical relationship of *kat’ elpida* does not change the point begin made here. For an analysis of this issue, see George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 346-47; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000) 451.

²⁹In this study the principle of *sola fide* will be stipulated rather than explained.

He sees them in His divine Son. The sinner is justified.

Now, because he is at peace with God, because he is accepted by God, because the penalty of sin has been paid and the power of sin has been broken, the justified sinner is expected to live as a growing testimony to the reality of God's righteous, redemptive love and presence in the world. This process is called sanctification.

Sanctification: The Basics

In order to establish the relationship between justification and sanctification, it is necessary to outline in brief the key elements of the doctrine of sanctification.³⁰ The key concept in sanctification is holiness, and the doctrine of sanctification articulates the biblical theme that God's people are holy people. As Graham Cole notes, the holiness of God's people plays a critical part in the story of redemption:

The canonical plotline reveals the story of God's reclaiming a fallen world and establishing a new heavens and earth in which righteousness is at home (2 Pet. 3:11-13). That new world will see God's holy people living in God's holy presence in God's holy city in God's holy way (Rev. 21:1-4). The activity of God in sanctifying a people for himself is integral to that story."³¹

This vital aspect of the story of redemption is traditionally expressed in two categories: positional or definitive sanctification, and progressive or conditional sanctification.

Positional Sanctification

Since the basic meaning of holiness is set-apartness or otherness,³² the first aspect of sanctification is the fact that God's people are set apart from the world and identified as belonging to God. Positional sanctification is "the indicative of salvation."³³

The idea that God's chosen people are "holy unto the Lord" occurs repeatedly in the OT context of God's covenant with Israel (e.g., Lev 20:26). In the

³⁰Because the other articles in this issue of the *MSJ* develop the particulars of sanctification, to stay focused on the topic at hand and avoid redundancy, this section will be much shorter than the previous one on the basics of justification.

³¹Graham A. Cole, "Sanctification" in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 721.

³²In the OT, the noun *qds* "connotes the essential nature that belongs to the sphere of God's being or activity and that is distinct from the common or profane" (Naudé, *NIDOTTE* 3:879).

³³Demarest, *Cross* 407.

NT, believers in Jesus Christ are called saints, which carries forward the OT idea of set-apartness by means of the holiness/sanctification (*hagios/hagiazō*) word group. The concept of Christians being “holy ones” dominates Paul’s writings (40x) when he is referring to the church, and the term also is used frequently in John’s Apocalypse (13x) to refer to God’s people. That the term portrays God’s people to be set-apart ones is made explicit in texts like 1 Cor 6:1-2, where a categorical disjunction is posited between the saints on one hand and “the unrighteous” and “the world” on the other.

The language of being “called” reinforces this sense of separation. In Rom 1:7 and 1 Cor 1:2 Paul greets his readers as those who have been “called to be saints.” The latter passage reinforces the idea by identifying them as those who have been “sanctified in Christ Jesus.”

Moreover, God’s people are those who have been “delivered...from darkness and transferred...to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col 1:13). “Believers have been transferred from the realm of the profane into the arena of the holy because they belong to God the Father and Jesus Christ.”³⁴ And the writer of Hebrews emphasizes that this sanctification is a *fait accompli*, an objective reality, when he says, by God’s will “we have been sanctified [perf. pass. ptc. of *hagiazō*] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10).

Positional sanctification is often compared to justification, for it is another perspective on the action of God in response to saving faith: justification is the declaration of righteousness that makes the sinner acceptable to God; positional sanctification is the determination by God that the justified sinner is now set apart unto Himself as one of His holy people.³⁵

Progressive Sanctification

The “imperative” corresponding to the “indicative of sanctification” is progressive sanctification. Although God’s people have been marked out by him to be separate from the rest of the world, and even though this is an objective reality, God’s people are commanded to live accordingly: “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (Lev 20:26; cf. 19:2; 1 Pet 1:15-16). Paul’s writings everywhere assume that implementing this imperative is a progressive work.

Progressive sanctification is unlike justification and positional sanctification in that it is a cooperative work between God and the believer. First, progression in

³⁴Schreiner, *Paul* 219.

³⁵Distinguishing justification and positional sanctification in this way does not position them in an *ordo salutis*. The point is to appreciate the unique features of each perspective on the divine accomplishment of salvation.

practical holiness is made possible by the work of God in the believer—"it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" as He "works out" his salvation (Phil 2:11-12). Indeed, this is a work begun by God, and it is He who "will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (1:6).³⁶

The work of God in sanctification is attributed to the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:2; 2 Cor 3:18), the cooperation of the believer is described as "walking in the Spirit" (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16, 25), and the result is the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23). And as this passage demonstrates, the progression of sanctification depends on the work of the believer in response to and in cooperation with the work of God.

The cooperative nature of progressive sanctification is clear throughout the NT epistles. Paul refers to growth in holiness as putting off the old self and putting on the new self, which is "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:22-24), which in context is portrayed as a continual process. In 2 Cor 7:1 Paul's exhortation on the basis of God's gracious saving work is to "cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." Even though Paul knows that final holiness will not be realized by any believer prior to being glorified, he nevertheless enjoins the church to strive toward that goal so that they will "advance constantly in holiness."³⁷

The believer must not think that this work is easy. Rather, it is portrayed as a struggle: Peter says that one must be "applying all diligence" (2 Pet 1:5 NASU); the writer of Hebrews claims that one must "strive" for holiness (Heb 12:14). Even Paul, who goes to great lengths to show the extreme incongruity of a Christian sinning in light of his identification with Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6), goes on to lament how he himself is fully engaged in the struggle (Rom 7:21-4).

And yet the work of God is still overarching and prior to human effort. It must never be forgotten that human effort in progressive sanctification depends utterly on the prior work of God in redeeming sinners and setting them apart unto Himself, and on the victory God grants in Christ (Rom 7:25). "There is no such thing as self-sanctification. It is a work of God into which he nevertheless calls for and makes use of the cooperation of the whole Christian community."³⁸

³⁶The latter passage (along with 1 Thess 5:23-24) shows that progressive sanctification also has a future hope—i.e., that God himself will bring it to completion when Jesus returns (cf. Schreiner, *Paul* 221). On Paul's certainty of this hope, see Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 63-65.

³⁷Such would be the force of *epitelountes hagiōsunēn* (cf. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962] 258).

³⁸Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1983) 40.

Summary

The doctrine of sanctification, then, is concerned with the holiness of the believer. Positional sanctification, similar to justification, is a determination by God that a sinner is set apart as a member of God's chosen, holy people. It is therefore only and entirely the action of God. Progressive sanctification is that growth in practical holiness—one could say behavioral righteousness—that involves the obedience of the believer to God's commands to grow in Christlikeness.

Ensuring the Distinction

At last, what has been said to the question asked at the beginning may be applied: what is the relationship between justification and sanctification? Much of the answer to this question has been implied in the foregoing discussion, so the remaining task is to draw this all together and answer a few relevant questions. What remains will compare, contrast, and relate justification and progressive sanctification. First, a few words about how these must be kept distinct.

Sanctification Does Not Cause Justification

The first point of distinction, and a hallmark of the Reformation, is that sanctification is not the basis for justification. Holy behavior does not bring God's favor and His declaration of righteousness.

A sustained argument against the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification is beyond the scope of this study, but a few representative statements will be cited so that application can be made to the present discussion. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says "Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man."³⁹ Justification, which is conferred in baptism, "conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy" (§1992). Further, "Justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom" (§1993). On this basis, in the Catholic view, one's justifying righteousness can wax, wane, or be destroyed completely. The practice of the sacraments will preserve and increase one's justification.

But given even the basic discussion presented above, this is impossible, for sinners cannot participate in gaining a status of righteousness before God. Justification can never be on the basis of "works done by us in righteousness," but is always and only "according to his own mercy" (Titus 3:5).

³⁹The Catechism of the Catholic Church, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM (accessed 6/23/2010), §1989, cf. §2019. Remaining citations will be parenthetical and will refer to this official online version.

In the face of such teaching, Calvin formulated a profound rationale for maintaining the distinction between justification and sanctification: to preserve the goodness of God. Cornelis Venema explains,

Unless justification is carefully distinguished from repentance [Calvin's term, interchanged with "regeneration," for progressive sanctification], God's goodness and his free grace in Christ will not be properly appreciated, and it will become impossible to insure the believer's confidence and rest in God's mercy alone as the sole basis for salvation. Accordingly, Calvin primarily distinguishes between justification and sanctification in order to preserve the gratuitous character of God's grace in Christ and to provide a basis for the assurance of salvation. If the gospel benefits of justification and sanctification are confused, Calvin is convinced that some credit for righteousness will inevitably be transferred to us, and God's mercy will be called into question. Since justification is God's free gift, and since we never possess a perfect righteousness of our own, it is conceptually confused to say that our justification is partially or wholly dependent upon sanctification.⁴⁰

Calvin's insight is deep and biblically grounded: if justification depends on human accomplishment and is yet portrayed as the gift of God, the obvious imperfection of human righteousness will be imputed to God and His goodness will be doubted. Maintaining the distinction between being declared righteous and growing in practical holiness is therefore a matter of faithfulness not only to the gospel but to the very goodness of God.

Justification Does Not Cause Sanctification

The second point of distinction is in the reverse direction: sanctification, strictly speaking, is not caused by justification. This error is not as serious as the previous, but it is still a matter of understanding the gospel and Christian life rightly.

It has already been noted that justification and positional sanctification are similar—declaration of right standing with God and a determination that the sinner is now set apart unto God. Both are the objective, monergistic accomplishment of God. The relationship of justification and progressive sanctification is a bit trickier. If one posits that justification gives rise to sanctification, then it seems natural to conclude that justification is—or effects—an inward change in the sinner. But this is precisely the error that the reformers were trying to avoid: formulating justification in terms of an inward change that brings about practical holiness that in turn makes the sinner acceptable to God.

That justification and progressive sanctification are inseparable realities is indisputable in Paul's understanding. This connection is very clear in Rom 6:15-23.

⁴⁰Venema, "Calvin's Understanding" 80.

On the basis of his foregoing discussion of justification, Paul shows that believers were slaves to sin but now are slaves to righteousness, and the fruit of this is “sanctification” (v. 22). “This, in fact, is the subject of the present section of the Epistle (chapters vi-viii). Those who have been justified are now being sanctified; if a man is not being sanctified, there is no reason to believe that he has been justified.”⁴¹ In other words, “sanctification is not merely the completion (correlate or implicate) of justification; it is justifying faith at work. In the faith counted for righteousness, actual righteousness is born.”⁴² So the two are inseparable. But does this mean that justification causes sanctification?

The problem with an affirmative here is that progressive sanctification does not appear to be an effect of a forensic declaration. Justification brings about certain objective benefits (righteous standing, acceptance with God, peace with God, etc.), so it could be said that justification sets the stage for sanctification. But the most that could be concluded from this is that holy living should arise from a gratitude for these objective benefits.

However, it is common to go beyond this and assume that if sanctification does not cause justification, the reverse must be true. What, then, is the nature of the connection of these two inseparable aspects of the gospel?

Discerning the Unity

The importance of keeping justification and sanctification distinct has been outlined, but their unity must also be properly upheld in order to reflect the fullness and unity of the gospel message.

Importance of the Unity

Though blurring the distinction between justification and sanctification is perilous to the gospel itself, overdrawing the distinction is also a potential pitfall. It is possible to overemphasize this distinction to the point that it becomes a separation. Justification and sanctification can become so distinct that they are no longer vitally connected.

The result of such a misstep could include the notion that one believes in Jesus as Savior at one time, then may or may not bow to Him as Lord at some point later in life—the myth of the carnal Christian. This amounts to the idea that one can experience justification by faith alone and enjoy the benefit of a righted relationship with God, but never grow in personal holiness. But it has already been shown that this is inconceivable in NT thought.

⁴¹Bruce, *Romans* 142-43.

⁴²R. E. O. White, *EDT* 970.

United in Christ the Substitute

The answer to this overcorrection is to see that justification and sanctification are parts of the same whole, or—perhaps better—that they both arise from the same soteriological reality: substitutionary atonement and its application in the attendant reality of union with Christ. Justification and sanctification both flow from the cross of Christ as a part of His whole redemptive work. They are both granted as part of the blessing of salvation, which can be summarized in the Pauline theme of union with Christ.

On the one hand, as already shown, justification depends on substitution—the Father is able to see a justified sinner as righteous because that sinner is united with Christ and therefore appears under the divine righteousness which Christ has as the Son of God. On the other hand, union with Christ the substitute lays the foundation for progress in practical holiness. Paul makes this point forcefully in Rom 6, the teaching of which could be summarized, “Christ’s death counts as our death, and Christ’s life is now our life. Therefore, we are accepted in Christ and are partakers of his resurrection life.” The result of this, as already noted, is “sanctification” (v. 22). So it could be said that justification and sanctification are both rooted in substitutionary atonement and the application of it: union with Christ.

The comments of some who see justification as the basis for sanctification even show that they are really attributing this relationship to a common source in substitutionary atonement. Schreiner provides a ready example from his comments on sanctification in Romans 6: “The forensic and the transformative [i.e. justification and sanctification] are not merged together here, but we do see that the legal is the basis of the transformative.” But then immediately he goes on to talk about how the “cross-work of Jesus Christ, in which he fulfilled the law by offering himself as a sin offering, has as its goal the obedience of the believer (Rom 8:1-4).”⁴³ This move shows that instead of seeing God’s legal declaration of righteousness as the basis for sanctification, Schreiner actually sees substitutionary atonement as the common source for both.

Calvin’s way of formulating justification and sanctifications as a “twofold righteousness” or a “double grace” nicely summarizes this biblical truth. Calvin insisted on seeing both of these benefits of salvation as coequal gifts from God that flow from a common source—the cross. “By partaking of [Christ], we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.”⁴⁴ So, for Calvin, “Sanctification does not come, as it were, from justifica-

⁴³Schreiner, *Paul* 209.

⁴⁴Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.1.

tion; it comes, like justification, straight from the cross. The double grace of salvation is integrated, not by allowing sanctification to encroach on justification, nor by relegating sanctification to second fiddle status, but by tracing both to Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵ Thus, “Sanctification is salvation, just as much as justification is salvation. It is grace. Nor is it optional, or dispensible, but necessary and inevitable.”⁴⁶ Therefore, the unity of justification and sanctification is found “in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Pastorally, this means that the believer is driven to the person of Christ for both righteousness and holiness, and that the preacher’s proclamation of free forgiveness and exhortation to obedience both rest upon Christ.”⁴⁷ Viewing justification and sanctification as “two kinds of righteousness” thus has substantial merit for a theology that is unified, properly systematic, and pastorally practical.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Beginning with the divine motivations for the act of justification, and following through the desire of God for His people to be holy in their everyday lives have shown the distinctions between justification and sanctification. Such distinctions are important for maintaining an orthodox gospel. These distinctions could be summarized as follows:

⁴⁵Rainbow, “Double Grace” 103.

⁴⁶Ibid., 104.

⁴⁷Ibid. Expanding on this slightly shows the way that both depend on Christ found in His role as our substitute. Calvin makes this more explicit in, e.g., *Institutes* 2.16.7

⁴⁸See also the helpful conclusions of Lane, “Twofold Righteousness” 221.

Justification	Sanctification
Objective	Subjective
Instantaneous	Progressive
Imputed righteousness	Experiential righteousness
Indicative	Imperative
Monergistic	Synergistic
God's acceptance of us	Our imitation of Him

The importance of maintaining the unity of these two aspects of salvation is evident. The points of convergence can be expressed by saying that justification and sanctification are both

- Enabled by Christ's substitution
- Rooted in union with Christ
- Empowered by the Holy Spirit
- Appropriated by faith
- A reflection of the character of God.

In the end, the attributes of a righteous God, the source of justification and sanctification, are reflected in the lives of those who are justified and sanctified. God who loves sinners and calls them out of their sin and identifies them with His Son, who is their Substitute. In that identification, the sinner is declared to be righteous because of the Substitute's death, and he is given new life in the Spirit because of the Substitute's resurrection. From the fountainhead of God's grace in substitutionary atonement come both justification and sanctification.