

Sanctification in Community: The History, Doctrine, and Practice of Sanctification

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PART 3: A BETTER WAY—THE REFORMATION AND THE “DOUBLE BENEFIT” OF UNION WITH CHRIST: LUTHER, CALVIN, AND THE PURITANS WEIGH IN ON SANCTIFICATION

Introduction/Review:

Justification = Being Legally Regarded by God as Righteous

Sanctification = Becoming Practically or Experimentally Holy

The Crucial Question: How do we connect these two doctrines, emphasizing the importance of both without diminishing the importance of either?

Two Options; One Problem:

Roman Catholicism so emphasizes the personal holiness of sanctification that it neglects the imputed righteousness of justification.

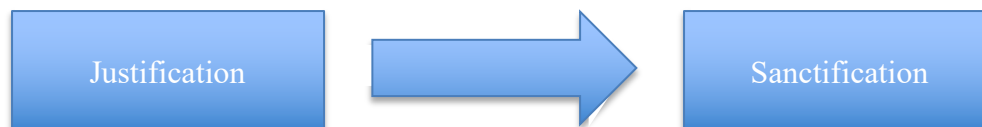
Two-Step Models of Sanctification emphasize the righteous standing that a believer receives in justification so exclusively that it effectively makes the personal holiness of sanctification optional.

A Common Problem: Both models see justification and sanctification as being in a *hopeful, causal* relationship.

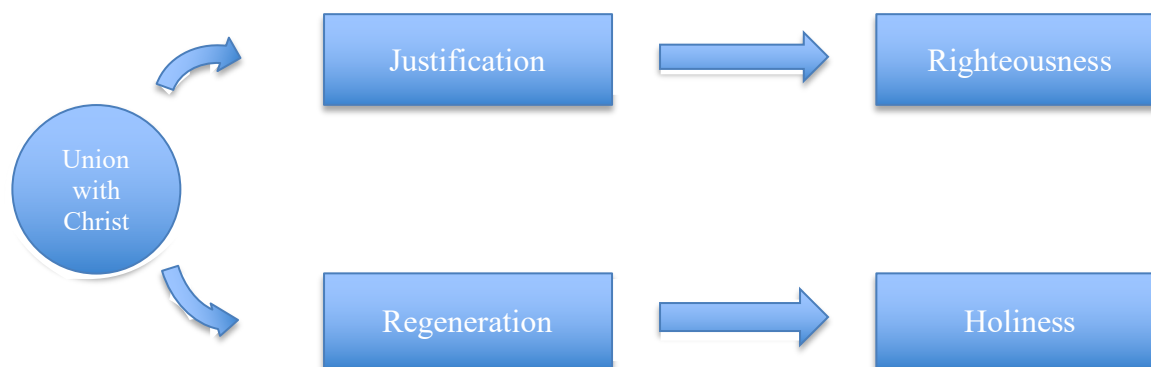
The Roman Catholic Model says, essentially, that if I work hard enough on my sanctification, then *hopefully* I'll accumulate the grace necessary to *cause* God to justify me.



Two-Step Models say, essentially, that if I preach the Gospel to myself over and over and I meditate long and hard on my new standing in Christ, then *hopefully* this will *cause* me to overflow with gratitude and by faith begin to become holy as Christ lives through me.



The Solution: The Reformers suggested that our salvation be described in terms of a *Duplex Beneficium* or “Double Benefit” of Union with Christ. There is but one source, one fountain from which all the blessings of salvation flow, namely, union with Christ. And all these benefits may be classed under two categories: A new Christian *standing* and a new Christian *experience*. Note the earlier diagram:



Explanation: The two tracks of redemptive benefits do not stand in a *hopeful* and *causal* relationship with each other, but rather in a *necessary* and *parallel* relationship. That is to say that if a person is truly “in Christ” he has, once for all, a perfect new standing in Christ that is the basis of God’s assessment of a believer as truly righteous or justified. It also means that along with that new standing, every person that is truly “in Christ” is also most emphatically a new creature, with a new nature, who has been equipped by God to advance in personal holiness and Christlikeness. And these two *parallel* benefits of the crosswork of Christ *necessarily* accrue to the believer together.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;
 Let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed,
 Be of sin the *double cure*: save from wrath and make me pure (orig. *save me from its guilt and pow’r*)

The Historical Development of This Model:

Martin Luther’s Discovery of “Two Kinds of Righteousness”

- First, there is a kind of righteousness that is *legal* in nature—it has to do with my standing before Christ:

In justification “a person becomes guiltless, pure, and sinless, while at the same time continuing full of evil inclinations.... A person is thus pure by the gracious imputation of God, rather than by virtue of his own nature.” He adds: “The grace [of justification] is not some sort of disposition or quality of the heart.... [Though] by mercy we are free of guilt ... we still need the gift of the Holy Spirit to clean out the remnants of sin in us.... The Christian is not formally righteous, he is not righteous according to substance or quality.”

- There is also a second kind of righteousness that has to do with the Christian’s new *experience*.

Melanchthon, Calvin, Owen, and the “Double Benefit”

Melanchthon: “Now to the question: If we are not just because of works, then what need is there for doing well? We answer as usual: The benefit of justification has been transferred to Christ in order that it may be certain, that is, a person is righteous, that is, accepted, for the sake of Christ. And in order that this may be certain, it does not depend upon our worthiness, but it is imputed to the believer because of Christ, that is, to him that accepts it by faith. Thereafter the new obedience is necessary *because with the imputation there comes about renewal, which is the beginning of new and eternal life*. The beginning of the new and eternal life is truly new and spiritual obedience. Therefore new and spiritual obedience is necessary.” He adds by way of explanation, “When it is said: new obedience is necessary to salvation, the papists understand that good works merit salvation. This proposition is false; therefore I give up using this way of speaking. Nevertheless, it is customary to say: New obedience is necessary, not as a merit, but by the necessity of formal cause such as when I say: a white wall is necessarily white.”

The Practical Face of Sanctification:

- **Initial or Definitive Sanctification:** I have “set aside” the old man, breaking sin’s power.
- **The New Nature of Regeneration:** I have put on the new man that is energized by the Spirit.
- **Progressive Sanctification:** I am extirpating the remnants of sin through obedience.

Passage	The Dynamic or Basis of Sanctification		The Progressive Imperative of Sanctification: Obedience
	The Negative Statement: Definitive Sanctification	The Positive Statement: Regeneration	
Romans 6:1–14	“We died to sin.” “Our old self was crucified.”	“All of us ... have been baptized into Christ Jesus.” “[We were raised] to walk in newness of life.”	vv. 11–14
Colossians 3:1–17	“You died.” “You laid aside the old self with its evil practices.”	“[You] have put on the new self.”	vv. 5–17
Ephesians 4:17–32	“You took off the old self.”	“You are being renewed in the spirit of your minds” “You put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.”	vv. 25–32

Conclusion: Sanctification is as vitally important and as absolutely necessary of a Christian as being white is necessary of a white wall. When you became a Christian you received a perfect new standing *and* you became a fledgling new creature. The newfound ability to please God with your new nature is imperfect and can by no means contribute to your new standing; nevertheless, it *always* accompanies your new standing. This reality contains not only a great promise, but also a great warning:

- **The Promise:** If you have been united with Christ for justification, he has along with that justification also given you everything you need to live for him. And by the ordinary means of grace—the Spirit, the Word, the Church—you are able to please God.
- **The Warning:** If evidence of a new nature is entirely absent, this is a troubling pointer to the absence not only of a new nature but also of a new standing.