

The Order of Salvation Reconsidered

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Much has been made in evangelical Christian theology about the proper distinction between justification, sanctification and glorification in the “process of salvation.” It is widely believed that justification is the declaration of righteousness that occurs at the inception of the Christian life. Sanctification follows as the process of being made more godly, while glorification signifies the last and final step in the “process of salvation” at the end of the Christian life. We will be glorified in the future when we are made completely righteous and contain no sin whatsoever. To put it another way, we begin “the process of salvation” by being declared righteous through faith by virtue of Christ’s finished work on the cross. This is considered our once-for-all justification. After justification, we begin the process of not just being declared righteous, but actually being made righteous in our behavior by the power of the Holy Spirit. This second step is complete at our future glorification, in which we become completely holy. This process has been called the “order of salvation” (*ordo salutis*).¹ This understanding is now assumed by many and has become the interpretational grid by which the Scriptures are understood. Since it is claimed that this “order of salvation” represents the teaching of the Scriptures on every aspect of salvation (the whole process of salvation), then it reasonably follows that every passage of the Bible can be understood to fit within this framework. Therefore, passages about the cross of Christ and faith are seen to fit in the first step of the salvation process. Commands for holy living are understood to fit in the second step in the process of salvation. Biblical promises about the future and the life to come are relegated to the hope of future glory or glorification.²

Recently it has been increasingly observed that the biblical descriptors—justification, sanctification and glorification—don’t fit quite so neatly into these steps as it has been supposed.³ This has been acknowledged by some who still remain devoted to “the order” as the biblical understanding of how salvation works. D.A. Carson is a good example of this.⁴ For instance, he recognizes that the biblical use of the term “sanctification” covers a broader field than “the order” allows. However, he maintains that “the process of salvation” is biblically tenable, even if the terminology cannot be contained by these categories. He acknowledges that the term sanctification also represents a declaration of status before God, and not a process of being made

1. The best work that I know of that reflects the establishment of this understanding is the widely read and endorsed book by John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied, Eerdmans, 1955

2. Two of John Piper’s books are perfect illustrations of this reality. In Counted Righteous in Christ he asserts the importance of keeping “justification” and “sanctification” separate in our scheme of redemption in chapter 2. Then he proceeds to exegete texts in chapter 3 and following with an *a priori* commitment to understand texts in the traditional way. Future Grace is written from the standpoint that faith in what God does in the future “sanctifies” us, but in no way “justifies” as. The two are kept separate.

3. This has been recognized by Richard Gaffin, and well documented in his book, Resurrection and Redemption: A Study of Paul’s Soteriology, P&R 1978

4. Carson addressed this issue during a lecture at Wheaton College at the 12th Annual Wheaton Theology Conference, “Vindication of Imputation: Fields of Discourse.” 2003

more holy. He argues that a second step process remains biblically tenable even though the terminology is not exact. Of course, he may be correct. The problem arises, however, when the definition of a term, such as justification, is understood to *have to fit in a particular step of the process* in order to remain true to what that word represents. For example, if justification is understood to be *only* a once-for-all declaration at the inception of the Christian life, it becomes a problem when a biblical writer uses it to describe a declaration that happens at the end of the Christian life. At this point we are either led to question whether the order accurately represents the biblical data, or we must propose that, while the order is accurate, the words that represent that order have a wider semantic field of meaning than what the order represents. D.A. Carson chooses the latter explanation. He maintains that the process of salvation is accurately understood, but the words (justification, sanctification, glorification) that represent these realities can be used in diverse ways.⁵ Sanctification can be used by a biblical writer to describe an event we would normally think of as justification, such as Hebrews 13:12, “So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.” Justification can be used by a biblical writer to describe an aspect of our salvation that we would normally understand to reflect sanctification, such as Romans 6:6,7, “We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is *freed* (the Greek is: justified) from sin.” According to the “order of salvation,” freedom from the power of sin falls under the category of sanctification, not justification.⁶ The semantic field argument would maintain that justification as a theological category is maintained despite the fact that the biblical writers used this word in broader terms than “the order” recognizes. However, the reality that these terms are used by the biblical writers in ways not limited to the “order of salvation” raises an important issue that we cannot easily ignore. If Paul can use the word “justification” in ways diverse from our understanding of what that term represents, wouldn’t it also follow that Paul’s understanding of what that word represents may also be diverse from our understanding? In other words, if Paul meant by “justify” not just a forensic declaration but also a process of being made more righteous, shouldn’t that have implications for what *we* mean by “justification?” To put it simply, shouldn’t we mean what Paul meant when he used the words he used? In order to represent the *biblical* doctrine of justification, we must mean what the biblical writers meant by what it means to be justified. I want to know what Paul meant when he said “we are justified by faith,” and the only way to test anyone’s understanding is to compare that with the biblical writer’s understanding.

As the reader can tell, I take the position that the “semantic field” argument has served to obscure a very real problem. The problem is an accepted understanding of biblical terminology (the order of salvation) which is at variance with the biblical realities that these words represent.

5. John Piper also reflects this tendency in a footnote in his book Counted Righteous in Christ. He writes, “I am using sanctification in its usual meaning of the ongoing process of being made practically holy. I am not denying that the word *hagiazō* may have wider more nuanced meaning in the New Testament.”p.49 As we will see, the “usual meaning” that Piper refers to as a progressive increase in holiness cannot be the meaning of the biblical writers.

6. Murray is unequivocal in his insistence on this fact. According to him, the very gospel is at stake in understanding that justification has nothing to do with freedom from the power of sin. “We are justified in Jesus’ blood. The particular significance of this truth in this connection is that it is a once-for-all redemptive accomplishment of Christ that is brought into the centre of attention when we are thinking of justification. It is therefore something objective to ourselves and *not* the work of God’s grace in our hearts and minds and lives.” (p.127)

In this paper, I shall attempt to put forward a perspective that is quite different from the “order of salvation” that has been handed down to us, but hopefully brings the terminology in line with consistent biblical usage. In other words, I write this as an attempt to be more thoroughly biblical.

The purpose of this paper is to examine what the biblical writers meant by the terms justification, sanctification and glorification, and how the biblical writers used these terms in relation to the others. I will follow the “order of salvation” chronology and begin with justification. It has to be acknowledged that many times the word is used in a way that describes God’s declaration at the inception of the Christian life. This is quite clear from passages like Romans 5:1 “Therefore, *having been justified by faith*, we have peace [or “shall have peace ”] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained access into this grace in which we have stood and we shall boast upon the hope of the glory of God.” This is also reflected in Romans 5:9: “Therefore, how much more, *having been justified now by his blood*, will we be saved through him from wrath?” Also Titus 3:7: “he saved us...by the washing of rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit, so that we, *having been justified by his grace*, might be heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Clearly then, we can and should speak about the present reality of being justified, because we were justified when we first believed. Paul can describe us being “justified by faith,” “by his blood” and “by his grace.” Interestingly, these three references are unified in the timing of our justification but describe three different means of our present justification. Romans 5:1 makes our response of faith in God’s promise justifying, Romans 5:9 describes Christ’s cross-work as justifying, and Titus 3:7 establishes the renewing work of the Spirit as what justifies us, summarized as God’s grace. We will return to this point later, but for now it suffices for us to recognize the reality of our present justification *having been* established. It is important to note as well, that various biblical terminology is synonymous with the term justification. Returning to Romans 5:9, it is apparent that the term “reconciliation” is synonymous with justification. The logic of Paul’s thought bears this out as follows: “Since *we have now been justified* by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies *we were reconciled* to him through the death of his Son, how much more, *having been reconciled*, shall we be saved through his life!” (vv. 9-10).

It is reasonable to conclude then, that to be justified before God is to be reconciled to Him as well. This is also true of “forgiveness.” To be forgiven by God is synonymous to be justified by God, as the following text shows:

However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who *justifies* the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are they whose transgressions *have been forgiven*, whose sins are covered” (Romans 4:5,7)

Clearly, to be justified is to be forgiven. God justifying the wicked means a man’s sins are forgiven. It is by the blood of Christ that this wicked man is justified, or in other words, by faith in Christ’s cross-work this man is justified and forgiven. So just as we can talk about *having*

been justified we can also talk about *having been reconciled* and *having been forgiven*. These are moments that have occurred and the effects carry on into the present.

So far so good for the traditional order of salvation. Nothing that has been observed from Scripture would be denied by anyone. However, the term “justification” does not just refer to a declaration in the past, but also refers to a declaration that is to continue to be experienced in the present. In other words, justification refuses to be limited to a past transaction with ongoing present effect, but also reflects an ever-present transaction between the believer and the God who continues to justify His people. First, this can be seen to be consistent with the need for God’s people to have a persevering faith. If it is true that God’s people are justified by faith, then it follows that the need for a persevering faith also reflects a need for us to persevere in God’s justifying verdict. This can be discerned in the fact that God is the one “who is justifying those who have faith in Jesus” (Rom.3:26; 4:5; 8:33). God is the one *declaring* the justifying verdict for those who have faith. Secondly, this is seen in the need for a persevering faith for a present declaration from God. Paul makes this clear, “Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain” (1 Cor.15:1,2). Past faith will not justify a person who stops believing. Paul makes clear that past faith is in vain if we don’t “hold firmly to the word” by continuing to believe. To continue to believe is to continue to be justified by God, since we are justified by a persevering faith. Also Romans 11:20, “They were broken off [the Jews] because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.” Here again, Paul is writing to people who are standing “by faith” and are justified before God, but it is also true that they must continue to stand “by faith” or they will be cut off like the Jews of the Old Covenant. To say that God justifies the wicked cannot mean that God justifies the unbeliever. We must persevere in faith to continue to enjoy God’s justifying verdict.

This can also be seen when we look at the synonymous terms of justification and forgiveness. In the so-called “Lord’s Prayer” in Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4, Jesus instructs the disciples to pray for forgiveness “when they pray”(Lk.11:2). This was to be a regular petition for those who believe in Jesus. If we grant that justification is synonymous with forgiveness, as we have seen, then it follows that we, by praying for forgiveness, are also petitioning for God’s justification of the wicked (Rom.4:5). This is reflected as well in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” In other words, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will justify the wicked (forgive us our sins), and purify us from all unrighteousness. God’s justifying verdict is a present experience for the believer.⁷ This cannot be considered a sort of “memorial” of the first justifying verdict, because it follows from John’s conditional statement that if we don’t confess our sins, God is faithful and just to *not* forgive us our sins—or in other words “justify the wicked.” As we saw before, God does not justify the unbeliever. God promises to forgive us *if*

7. Jonathan Edwards recognized this and argued against the impulse to limit God’s justifying verdict to the inception of the Christian life. See Edwards The Works of Jonathan Edwards, volume 2, Banner of Truth p.641 See also Schreiner, Caneday, The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance, IVP p.p.76.77

we confess our sins. Faith believes the promise and confesses before God. The offer is real, and so is the justification (forgiveness). A particularly important text for this present justification is Romans 8:33,34. Paul writes, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? God is the one *who is justifying*; who is the one condemning? Christ Jesus, the one who died, indeed, who was raised from the dead, and who is at the right hand of God, who *is also interceding* for us.” Christ’s death on the cross is ministered to us in the present and enabling God’s ever-present justification.⁸ (See Hebrews 7:25).

The same is true of “reconciliation.” We saw how Paul uses reconciliation synonymously with justification in Romans 5. Paul can both celebrate the reconciliation we have in Christ and command his fellow Christians in Corinth to “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). In fact, this tension is reflected in this passage. Paul describes the apostolic ministry as an ambassadorship of reconciliation. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19). Here he again links forgiveness of sins with reconciliation. “And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Notice, the command to “be reconciled” is for those who “have been reconciled.” The Corinthians are in need to “be reconciled” to God. They need to continue to be reconciled, or in other words, justified. This is clear from what follows, “As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:1,2). *Now* is the day of salvation for the believers at Corinth. There are some at Corinth who are at odds with Paul, who is God’s fellow worker (2 Cor. 6:1). So for them to be at odds with Paul, they are also at odds with God. This leads to Paul’s command for them to “Be reconciled to God.” This is why it makes sense for Paul, in the very next verse, to defend his ministry. They were to be reconciled to God by being reconciled to God’s ambassador, the apostle Paul. In summary, their present need for reconciliation to God (“now is the time of God’s favor”) is the same as saying that they are presently need of God’s justifying verdict. To be made right (justified/reconciled/forgiven) with Paul, was to be made right (justified/reconciled/forgiven) with God.⁹

Justification is also represented by the biblical writers as not only a past and present, but also as a future declaration. Jesus himself uses it this way in Matthew 12:37. In response to being accused of healing by the power of demons Jesus speaks of the future judgment. He states, “I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words *you will be justified* and by your words you will be condemned.” In this exchange, Jesus depicts justification being made “on the day of judgment.” Paul speaks in the same way in Romans chapter 2. In this passage Paul is arguing for the necessity of perseverance

8. Schreiner makes the comment that “the present tense of dikaiōn should not be pressed to say that God is continually justifying us.” He acknowledges that Christ is always, in the present, interceding in behalf of his people, but fails to make the obvious connection between Christ’s present intercession based on Christ’s finished work on the cross, and God’s present justification. Romans: An Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, p.462

9. This is evidenced by the life of Abraham. He believed in Genesis 12 and was justified in Genesis 15. Clearly he was reckoned righteous *again*.

in doing good in order to gain eternal life, whether a person is a Jew or a Gentile. “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:9-11). He goes on, “All who sin without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law *who will be justified*” (Rom. 2:13). It becomes clear that he is speaking of this justifying verdict taking place in the future at the final judgment, as he closes this section, “[this will occur] on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 2:16). Paul again speaks of a future justification in Galatians 5:5. In this letter, Paul contends for justification by faith in Christ and not by the law. This is his immediate concern in Galatians 5:4,5. He writes, “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” Next Paul describes what is to be justified by faith in Christ: “For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.” Notice the parallels below:

(v.4) you are severed from Christ; you who would be justified by the law
 (v.6) for in Christ Jesus circumcision is nothing

for/but

(v.5) through the Spirit, by faith (in Christ)
 (v.6) faith (in Christ) working through love (avails)

(v.5) we wait for the hope of righteousness

The above analysis shows that these are parallel descriptions. The first set indicates what not to do. To try to be justified by the law is to get circumcised. *But* what we are to do is live by faith in Christ through the power of the Spirit, and this is “faith working through love.” This is the key point: it is by faith in Christ, through the power of the Spirit that “we wait for the hope of righteousness.” Or in other words, it is by faith in Christ working through love that we will be justified. We remember from Paul in Romans 8 that no one hopes for what he already has. The justification (declaration of righteousness) that the Jews were hoping to attain to through the law, Paul maintains we attain to it “by faith working through love.” This fits the prior context where trying to “justified by the law” is the concern. It is this declaration of righteousness (justification) that we have yet to receive, a future declaration.

From these three passages, it is quite clear that we can and must speak of a future justification if we are to speak in biblical ways about justification. The biblical writers clearly understood God’s justifying verdict to have a past, present and future component. God’s people have been justified, must persevere in their justification and hope to be justified at the judgment at the end of time. This reality bursts the boundaries of the traditional “order of salvation.”¹⁰

10. John Murray insists on this in his book. This is how he understands that God justifies the ungodly. The very first moment of faith is when we are justified, not on the basis of our faith, but through faith we receive Christ’s

Secondly, it is interesting that the biblical writers felt quite free to provide various reasons for a person's justification. Justification can be based on the predestining foreknowledge of God from eternity past (Rom. 8:29,30; 9:11). It can be based on the cross of Christ, without mention of the believing subject (Rom. 5:9). Justification can be based on faith, without mention of the cross (Rom. 5:1). And it can be based on the grace of God in the life of the believer (Titus 3:7). Justification can be based on works with or without faith being mentioned (Matt. 12:37; Rom. 2:13; James 2:23). Of course, these concepts are not at all contradictory. These can all be spoken of as "causes" of our justification, just as "the cause" of a flood could be ascribed to rain, or snow melt, or warm weather, or the jet stream. "The warm weather caused the flood" is a true statement, just as "Melting snow caused the flood" is a true statement. These do not have to be either/or statements. When we put it all together, the warm weather caused the rapid snow melt, combining with rainfall, caused the flood. Each was a contributing cause. Likewise, without the cross no man will be justified before God, but it is also true to say without faith in Christ's work on the cross no man will be justified, just as it is true to say without the good work of forgiving others no man will be justified.¹¹ From this, it is quite clear, that while justification is used primarily to describe God's forensic declaration of righteousness, *the basis* of this declaration cannot be limited to Christ's work on the cross. It also encompasses God's work in the lives of those who believe. This biblical teaching also bursts the boundaries of the traditional *ordo salutis*.¹² A clear text on this point is found in Titus 3:5-7:

He saved us, not from works which have been done in righteousness, *but* according to his mercy *through* the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out upon us richly *through* Jesus Christ our Savior *in order that* having been justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Paul first explains what their salvation has been according to, it has *not* been according to works, but it has been according to mercy, which is "through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." We have been washed and renewed *in order that* having been justified, we might become heirs. From the above analysis, the grace that has justified us has been the grace of God that has washed and renewed us. "Having been justified by grace" is a participle that follows from the previous description of God's mercy as a "washing" and "renewing" mercy. In other words, we have been washed and renewed, in order that having been justified by this aforementioned this washing and renewal, we might become heirs of eternal life. John Calvin himself admits to this syntactical link when he states that "the context seems to demand" a wider

righteousness. Only after this do we begin to become godly.

11. Thomas Watson, A Body of Divinity, Banner of Truth p.158, Typical of the traditional view is that Jesus' cross-work is the sole ground of our justification. The expressed desire is to guard against man being glorified rather than God for our salvation. However, there is no biblical basis for claiming the cross to be the sole ground when grammatically the means of our justification is the same, i.e. by the cross, by faith, by grace, etc.

12. Murray, Redemption p.118, "Justification does not mean to make righteous, or holy, or good, or upright....justification does not refer to this renewing and sanctifying grace of God." p.127, It is therefore something objective to ourselves and not the work of God's grace in our hearts and minds and lives." p.126, "It is not the reward of anything in us or wrought by us but proceeds from God's free and unmerited favor."

use of justification than what that word entails in the traditional view.¹³ It is possible to suppose that the justification precedes the washing and renewal as the first step in the salvation process, but this seems unlikely from the logic of the text. What happened first was God breaking in by the Spirit, not our works. So God saved us by renewing us, this was our “justification by grace.”¹⁴ This understanding, however, is an impossibility according to the “order of salvation.” Justification, according to the proponents of the traditional order, cannot be in respect to anything wrought in us, since what is wrought in us by the grace of God, namely regeneration, belongs to sanctification.

Next we will look at the biblical concept of sanctification. Below is a list of all the New Testament passages that employ the verb “to sanctify” (*hagiadzw*).

John 17:17-19, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. *Sanctify* them by the truth. Your Word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, thus also I have sent them into the world. And in behalf of them, I *sanctify* myself in order that they also *may be sanctified*.”

Acts 20:32, “And now I commend you to God and to the Word of his grace, which is able to build and to give the inheritance among all *those who are sanctified*.”

Acts 26:18, “To open their eyes, to turn [them] from darkness to light, and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those *who are sanctified* by faith in me.”

Romans 15:16, “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of a reminder, because of the grace given me by God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offerings of the Gentiles may be acceptable, *having been sanctified* by the Holy Spirit.”

1 Corinthians 1:2, “To the church of God, to those who are in Corinth, to those *who have been sanctified* in Christ Jesus.”

1 Corinthians 6:11, “And such were some of you, but you were washed, you *were sanctified*, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

1 Corinthians 7:13,14, “If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For an unbelieving husband *has been sanctified* by the wife and the unbelieving wife *has been sanctified* by the husband.”

13. Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentary* p.384

14. Gordon Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary* p.204. Calvin himself agrees that here Paul links “justified by grace” with being renewed, but passes over the obvious implications. “If we understand regeneration in the strict and normal sense, it might be thought that the apostle makes ‘justified’ mean the same as ‘regenerated’ and this is sometimes its meaning, but only rarely. But here there is no need for us to depart from its normal and natural meaning....The context seems to demand that it (justified by grace) should have a wider meaning than the imputation of righteousness, but this use of the word is, as I have said, very rare with Paul, and there is nothing to prevent its being restricted to the forgiveness of sins.” *Calvin's New Testament Commentary* p.384

Ephesians 5:25-27, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself in behalf of her, in order that *he may sanctify* her, having cleansed her by the washing of water by the Word, that he may present the church to himself in splendor, not having any spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but in order that she may be holy and unblemished.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23, “May the God of peace himself *sanctify* you completely and may your spirit and soul and body be kept whole and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 Timothy 4:4,5, “For all creation of God is good and nothing is to be rejected after being received with thanksgiving, for *it is sanctified* through the Word of God and prayer.”

2 Timothy 2:21, “If anyone shall cleanse from these, he will be a vessel of honor, *having been sanctified*, useful for the Master, ready for any good work.”

Hebrews 2:11, “For the one *who is sanctifying* and those *who are being sanctified* are all from one origin.”

Hebrews 9:13,14, “For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of bulls and goats and with the ashes of a heifer *sanctifies* for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works in order to worship the living God.”

Hebrews 10:10, “And by that will *we have been sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Hebrews 10:14, “For by one offering he has perfected for all time those *who are being sanctified*.”

Hebrews 10:29, “How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which *he was sanctified* and outraged the Spirit of grace?”

Hebrews 13:12, “So Jesus also [suffered] outside the gate in order that *he might sanctify* the people through his own blood.”

1 Peter 3:15, “But in your hearts, *sanctify* Christ as Lord.”

Revelation 22:11, “Let the evil doer still do evil, and the filthy ones be filthy still, and the sanctified [holy] ones *be sanctified* [holy] still.”

After surveying passages with the verb “to sanctify” it becomes quite obvious that the writers of Scripture had a broader framework in mind than the advocates of the traditional order of salvation. Many of these texts cannot be understood under the aegis of an inner process of

gradual renewal in holiness. In fact, some uses of the word are used to describe what “the order” would consider justification. If sanctification is *only* to be understood as an inner work of the Holy Spirit after we are justified by faith in Christ’s blood, how can the writer of Hebrews say we have been sanctified through the body and blood of Jesus? (Hebrews 10:10; 13:12). If sanctification is *only* to be understood to be a dynamic process of inner change, how can the biblical writers use it *a majority of the time* as a declared status before God? (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Tim. 4:4,5; Heb. 9:13,14; 10:10; 10:29; 13:12). Clearly an unbelieving husband and food having been “sanctified” cannot refer to inner renewal for holiness! Certainly, the verb “to sanctify” is used by biblical writers to represent inner renewal. This is not under debate. The issue at hand is to show that this word cannot be limited to this definition. It can refer to a status in a way that justification normally functions. And as we have seen, justification can also function in a way that sanctification is normally understood (Romans 6:7; Titus 3:7).

Something else is important to mention in relation to this discussion of sanctification. John Murray makes it clear that “the order” is crucial for a proper understanding of the order of salvation. According to Murray, justification precedes sanctification. Inner process has nothing to do with justification and everything to do with sanctification. Justification must occur first, and sanctification follows as a next step. This does not seem to be the commitment of the biblical writers, for if it were, it would be strange for Paul to write, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ and called to be holy...” (1 Cor. 1:2). It would seem to be more theologically accurate to write, “To those justified in Christ and called to be holy.” Wouldn’t it be more theologically astute to refer to justification as a status and then speak of a church being called to holiness, or sanctification? Or how about 1 Corinthians 6:11? “And that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.” If the order is so crucial to a proper understanding of our redemption, how is it that it would occur to an apostle to put washing prior to sanctification, and sanctification prior to justification? This is odd to say the least!

The third major step in the “order of salvation” is glorification. This is understood to take place at the resurrection at the end of time, when we will be fully sanctified and made completely holy. At this point we will be glorified and sinless. Murray writes, “Glorification is the final phase of the application of redemption. It is that which brings to completion the process which begins in effectual calling. Indeed it is the completion of the whole process of redemption.”¹⁵ However, in reading the Scriptures it becomes clear that the glorification of the believer cannot be limited to an end-of-time reality. First we need to look at what glorification is, and then we can take another look at when glorification occurs.

Glorification can and does refer to a “glorious” state of being. This is implied by Paul, “who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). However, many occurrences of the verb (“to glorify”) and noun (“glory”) refer to praise and honor to be given or received. In fact “glory and honor” is a phrase that reflects this as we see below:

15. Murray, p.174

Romans 2:7, “To those who by persistence in doing good seek *glory and honor* and immortality, he will give eternal life.”

2 Corinthians 6:8, “through *glory and dishonor*, bad report and good report....”

1 Peter 1:7, “These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, *glory and honor* when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

2 Peter 1:17, “For he received *honor and glory* from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic glory saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

Revelation 4:9, “Whenever the living creatures give *glory and honor* and thanks to him who sits on the throne...”

Clearly, to glorify someone cannot be limited to changing their moral status to a glorious state of sinless perfection, but can also signify the attributing to them of honor. In fact, the occurrences of this use are dominant in the Scriptures.¹⁶ So the term “to be glorified” can speak both about a state of being and can be a term for praise and honor. This sentence illustrates both biblical uses: “The king was glorified by wearing his glorious robe and crown, and his loyal subjects glorified him with loud shouts of praise.” So we have seen that the word cannot be limited to an understanding of a glorious state of sinless perfection. But what about *when* this glorification occurs?

The best place to start is with Jesus Himself. We notice that He was glorified at the inception of his ministry at his baptism in Matthew 4:17. Peter reports that Jesus received “*honor and glory* from God the Father when the voice came to him from Majestic glory saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (2 Peter 1:17). Peter is reporting on his experience with Jesus on “the sacred mountain” (Mt.17:5). This declaration of sonship first occurred in Matthew 4 almost verbatim at his baptism. “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (4:17). So it is clear Jesus “was glorified” as God’s Son at His baptism. If this is in part what it means “to be glorified,” then it is true He was glorified even before that, with the angels in their heralding of the coming king (Lk.2:8-19). So Jesus was “glorified” at the very least, in the beginning of his earthly ministry. Then His glorification would continue through His humiliating death and consequent resurrection (John12:23;17:1,5). If the declaration of sonship is an aspect of glorification, then Jesus was glorified at his resurrection. Romans 1:3 “...and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead.” This is confirmed by 1 Peter 1:21, “He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.” Clearly, “being glorified” in this case cannot mean to be made sinless, since Jesus was sinless before his resurrection! His resurrection was his glorification, or declaration, as the Son of God.

16. The occurrences are too numerous to list. A concordance readily shows this.

It then follows that what was true for Jesus is also true for us. When we are declared to be sons of the living God we are glorified as His sons. This is how Paul can fold glorification into justification in Romans 8:30, “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” Too often this is seen as a logical progression which finds its goal *only* in a future glorification. We miss the fact that Paul refers to these aspects of God’s work as all-inclusive. People who are justified, are *also* at the same time glorified. As we have seen, it cannot be doubted that there is a future glorification that has to do with a change-of-being. In fact, this glorification can also be understood as describing the process of renewal that is typically under the heading of sanctification. Paul writes, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor.3:18). This glorification is a present and progressive reality. However, our *future* glorification cannot be limited to this reality of inner transformation. It also will have to do with a declaration of sonship just as it did for Jesus. Peter refers to this when he writes, “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of *glory* that will never fade away” (1 Peter 5:4). Peter again, “These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and result in praise, *glory and honor* when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7). Notice, both texts have to do with an end-time revelation, when a glorification will be bestowed. What is this end-time glorification? Nothing less than “the sons of God to be revealed.” Hear the apostle Paul, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (Rom. 8:18,19). The “sons of God” will be revealed with royal crowning and praise from Christ Himself. Just as Jesus was “declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead,” so will we be declared sons of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). We cannot lose sight of the fact that our end-time glorification will bring together a glorification of being as well as the bestowal of praise, probably similar to Jesus’ experience on the “mount of transfiguration” (Mt.17:1-13). This end-time praise Jesus anticipates and depicts through a parable, “Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master’s happiness!” (Mt.25:23).

From this study we are able to see that the biblical writers did not limit their uses of these terms to the parameters of the “order of salvation” as it has been handed down to us. All three terms refer to a past, present and future reality for God’s people. It is possible to speak of sanctification as preceding justification as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 6:11 because this framework was not operative for him as it is for so many today. What this study has made clear is that all three terms describe realities that are operative throughout the whole Christian experience. Also, it is quite clear that the biblical writers can refer to the same reality by all three terms. As we have seen, Jesus’ finished work on the cross can be described as both “justifying us” (Rom. 5:9) and “sanctifying us” (Heb. 13:12) and to the degree that His sacrificial death qualifies us to be declared sons of God, His cross also “glorifies us” (Rom. 5:19). In fact, it would be more accurate to say that all three terms are operative at the same time, and are describing different aspects of the same reality. Let me illustrate. A person who hears the

message of God's salvation and believes is from that moment "justified" before God. He is declared to be right relationally with God because his sins are forgiven in Christ. In being declared right with God, that person is *at the same time* sanctified, or set apart from a sinful world as God's own son. Also, by being declared right with God and set apart from the world that person is glorified and honored as a son of God. The Christian then proceeds through his life of faith being justified, that is, forgiven of sins and declared to be in the right with God (1 Jn.1:9). Likewise, he continues to be one of the "sanctified" or set apart. This being the case, he is also glorified and honored as God's son. All three terms describe the one reality of becoming and persevering in being a son of the Father through an ongoing life of faith up to the last day. The last day at the judgment of God is the final or consummative sanctification, justification and glorification. The believer is finally and for all time declared in the right with God (Romans 2:13), and because he is in the right, he is at the same time and for all time set apart for the kingdom of God (Mt. 25:31-33), this being the case, he is glorified and honored as a son of the King forever (1 Peter 1:7). This construction coheres better with the totality of the biblical witness. In other words, this construction explains all the ways these terms are used by the biblical writers in a way that the traditional order does not.

This in no way denies every aspect of what the traditional order of salvation teaches. Sanctification does, in some cases, indicate inner transformation of the believer. Justification is a term that does in almost all cases point to a forensic declaration of righteousness, and glorification can refer to a glorious state of being at the end of time. In fact, we can see how what I have described coheres well with these biblical uses. To be set apart as a child of God is to be set apart not just by a declared status, but also by behavior, by a state of being, by holiness. To be glorified is not just to be honored as a child of God, but it is to be made honorable, to display a glorious splendor, a creational way of being that consists with holiness and is no longer tarnished by the impediments of the curse. What I propose in no way denies what is biblical about the traditional view, but it does incorporate what is right about the traditional view into a wider construction that better explains the whole. At the same time, it cannot be denied that this re-construction will have far-reaching implications for how we understand our Christian lives and how they are to be lived. This should not dissuade us, however. If this understanding that I propose is more faithful to the biblical witness, then we will have a more biblical understanding of our Christian lives and how to live it. This I hope to illustrate by comparing John Piper's use of sanctification in his book "Future Grace" with an understanding of sanctification from my observations. My hope is that the implications for the different views are clarified, and I am able to commend the alternative proposed in this short treatment.

Excursus: Analysis of John Piper's Treatment of Sanctification In His Book, "The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace"

John Piper establishes the foundation of what he is contending for by maintaining from the outset that justification and sanctification are distinct. He writes, "In no way do I mean to confound justification and sanctification. They are distinct. Justification is not a human behavior of soul and body. But sanctification is a (divinely effected) human behavior of soul and body" (26). He begins by asserting the traditional distinction, order, and necessary separation. He then describes how justifying faith is the same faith that also sanctifies. Faith for justification embraces the promise held out to us in Christ at the cross (27). By faith alone in the promise of forgiveness found in the cross a person is justified. "Our only hope of progress in gradual sanctification (growing likeness to Jesus) is that we already have a right standing with God by faith alone. By this justification we are accepted into God's favor and enjoy a reconciled position."¹⁷ That same faith which embraced the promise for forgiveness at the cross, then, as a second step, sets its gaze on the many promises of God for our sanctification, or being made more holy. For example, the God who promised to forgive us, is the same God who promises to provide for us. We now set our hope in God's provision and this faith in this promise purifies (sanctifies) us from anxiety. The God who promised to forgive us at the cross, also promises to punish all evil people who do not repent. The faith that believes God's promise at the cross, now sets its gaze on God's promise to punish evil, we no longer feel the need to get others back and we are now sanctified from bitterness and vindictiveness.

For Piper, the cross is the place where justification takes place, by faith alone. All the other promises of God are separate from the promise at the cross and have to do with sanctification. The cross also serves as a past act of God by which future acts of God are to be trusted. The act of God in the past and our faith in that act has justified us. Our faith in the future acts of God, though the same faith, have different promises as its object. Forgiveness is no longer a promise to be believed, but one that has already been believed and received by Christ's finished work. The benefit of experiential holiness, not forgiveness or acceptance, is what we gain by faith in the promises of God (future grace to be given). Piper's understanding serves to keep the traditional order of salvation in place, while seeking to explain how faith and the corresponding obedience relate to each other. There is much to commend Piper for with this book. However, his understanding fails to do justice to the Scriptures. I will start with the most obvious point. Piper asserts that justifying faith believes God's promise to forgive on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross alone as the first step in the Christian life. However, Jesus Christ teaches that the promise of forgiveness is held out to God's people in a section of teaching that Piper would believe pertains to sanctification, the sermon on the mount. Here we have a series of commands and promises that serve to "purify" the believer. Jesus is teaching His already believing disciples when he says "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Mt.6:14,15). Notice, forgiveness is promised *in the future*, on the basis of obeying God's command to forgive. It would appear that a person purified of unforgiving ways

17. Piper, Counted Righteous in Christ p.49

is a person sanctified by faith in the future grace of forgiveness. According to our observations that justification has a future aspect in the Scriptures, this provides us with no difficulties. However, this turns Piper's construct on its head. According to Matthew 6:14,15, a person is justified by being sanctified (see also 1 John 1:9).

Also, Piper's construct creates the false impression that anxiety about God's provision has nothing to do with justification/acceptance before God. That is, faith in the future grace of God's provision saves you from the uncomfortable emotions of anxiety in this life, but not from the fires of hell. For Piper, we get on with faith in future grace for peace of mind, to glorify God with our peace- but not to escape judgment, because that is covered by a faith looking backward at what Jesus did at the cross *alone*. Once again, the Scriptures lead us to a different conclusion. Anxiety or "the worries of this life" make us unfruitful in the parable of the sower and to be unfruitful is to be "cut off" and "burned" (Mt. 13:22; Jn. 15:2,6). Jesus warns his disciples in Luke 21:34, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and *the anxieties of life* and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap." Anxiety about life's provision is symptomatic of unbelief, and Israel provides a perfect example of what unbelief, surfacing as anxiety, does to the people of God. It turns them into grumblers and complainers, and grumblers and complainers reveal themselves to be idolaters. Idolaters, according to Jesus Christ "are the dogs" left outside (Rev. 22:15). This is confirmed as Jesus introduces his teaching on anxiety, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. *Therefore*, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat and drink; or about your body, what you will wear" (Mt. 6:24,25). Jesus is quite clear, that to serve God and not money is to not be anxious about money, but at peace in the Father's promise to provide for all your needs. These passages point to the fact that those who will "be able to stand before the Son of God (Lk. 21:36) and bear much fruit and remain in Christ's love (Mt. 13:23; Jn. 15:9,10) and serve God and not idols (Mt.6:24) and "have the right to go through the gates into the city" are those who have not been consumed by anxiety about their daily needs (Rev.22:14).

In fairness, Piper does treat a failure to believe in God's future grace very seriously, and his language enters the ground inhabited by the doctrine of justification and its reverse, condemnation. He can say, "Faith in that grace (future) is the key to enduring on the narrow and hard way that leads to life."¹⁸ He can say, "We live moment by moment from the strength of future grace. If it were not there we would perish. But it is there. And every future good that we would enjoy, in this life and the next, will come from future grace."¹⁹ But he can also say, "The key (to love and generosity) is to turn from the glory and guarantee of bygone grace and put your faith firmly in future grace - that 'God is able (in the future) to make all (future) grace abound to you.'²⁰ At this point we must press him for clarity and ask the question, "What is the 'glory and guarantee of bygone grace?'" His answer is that it is Christ's gracious provision of forgiveness at the cross. What is the *guarantee* of the bygone grace of the cross? His answer is that you will not perish and will have eternal life by faith in this bygone grace alone. Here is the problem: If it

18. Piper, p.70

19. Ibid. p.72

20. Ibid. p.72

is true that we are *guaranteed* to not perish and to enter life by faith in this bygone grace *alone*, how can Piper now assert that we must trust in this future grace in order to endure to life and not perish? How can Piper say that justifying faith looks backward and trusts in Christ promise at the cross *alone*, but also looks forward to all the other promises of God? Here lies the incoherence. He would seek to answer these questions by saying that faith in bygone grace alone justifies and guarantees life, but that same justifying faith also sanctifies as it believes all of God's other promises, as it "turns from bygone justifying grace" to future sanctifying grace. But this is sleight of hand. He says on the one hand that not perishing and entering life depends on faith in what Christ did for you at the cross *alone*, but also depends on you believing all of God's other promises too! Let me illustrate. If I were to say to my son, "Jacob, you can spend time this afternoon on the computer, but the *one* thing you have to do is clean your room, and cut the grass and take out the trash." This makes no sense, since it is not by cleaning his room *alone*, but also by cutting the grass and taking out the trash that he receives the promise of the computer. He would be quick to point out my incoherence. Clearly, Piper is seeking to do justice to the biblical implications of not trusting in God's promises, but in order to do so he falls into a fatal contradiction. This fatal contradiction is not biblically necessary, but arises from an unbiblical assumption that justification can only take place at the inception of the Christian life and by faith alone in the cross of Christ alone.

Piper highlights the fact that Jesus has done the really hard thing in dying for our sins on the cross, so how will he not also give us all things? We believe he died for our sins and rose from the dead in victory, so how can we not also believe he will provide for our needs? This is indeed the logic of Paul's thought (Rom. 8:31,32). But there is something Piper doesn't recognize. The reverse is also true. If we can't believe that God can provide for our daily needs, the easy thing, how is it possible we can believe in Christ's death for our sins? How can we deny God our faith in the smaller things, and claim we believe in Him for the larger things? This is Paul's point. We can't! Jesus died and rose from the dead in order to create a people who would trust Him for all things, not for some things.

Once again, Israel provides a perfect example. The point of the powerful exodus from Egypt, by which a Passover lamb was slain and powerful miracles were performed, was, in part, to provide a powerful basis for their faith in their Lord for the future. They were to remember what their Lord did in order to inspire their faith for what he would promise in the future. We could repeat Paul's logic and apply it to Israel. The Lord did such amazing things in delivering Israel from the Egyptians, so how will he not also provide for their daily needs in the desert? Can you discern the parallel? The Lord did what he did in the past to enable faith in "future grace." However, as Paul reports, most, even though they witnessed God's great power, fell in the desert and died *because of their unbelief in future grace* (1 Cor. 10:1-10). They grumbled and complained and became idolaters. Everyone of them would tell you they believed that the Lord brought them out of Egypt, but they failed to believe in the lesser things, like God's ability to provide water and food. Jesus' words speak of the same imperative for God's new covenant people. To believe in God is to believe in God, and the faith that sanctifies is the same faith that justifies us before God.

This leads to a question. If we are justified by trusting God's provision for our daily needs, then how are we justified by Christ's work on the cross? The answer has to be that we are justified by faith in all of God's promises. Our Lord expects us to take him at his word in every respect, not in some respects. God must be trusted in order for us to glorify Him as trustworthy. Our unwillingness to trust our Lord in small things dishonor Him and makes it impossible for us to honor Him by faith in the big things. Also it must be emphasized, that our Lord takes into account that we are a people who stumble at many points (James 3:2). We will at times experience anxiety about the provision of our material needs. We will at times fall into grumbling against God in times of doubt and temptation. Jesus' work on the cross meets our need. Here I think Piper is fatally wrong to say we are to "turn from the glory and guarantee of bygone grace." Christ's finished work on the cross is ever-present for our daily needs of forgiveness, His mercies are new every morning at the foot of the cross. Christ continually intercedes for us before the Father as we draw near for cleansing (Rom. 8:33,34; Heb. 7:23,25; 10:19-22). We confess our unbelief and repent, turning to God and fighting the good fight of faith, we strive to not be anxious and be at peace as we remember God's promises all over again. We read Jesus' words of promise and look again to our God in our desert wandering. We are justified by faith in God's promise of forgiveness once again. Once again, our hearts are set at rest before our majestic Lord and He is glorified as trustworthy. This respects the fact that our justification and sanctification and glorification are on-going realities as we persevere by faith. The fact that Piper does not see this leads him to say we are "to turn away" from God's promise at the cross and move on to other promises. This is because he fails to understand that justification, along with sanctification, is a "future grace."²¹

Piper's interpretation of texts and the conclusions he reaches are the result of a determination to stay within the traditional order of salvation. However, it is clear that the traditional order is not reflective of the biblical writer's use of these biblical terms and so is therefore not faithful to their intent. The incoherence in Piper's conclusions are the natural result of his prior dogmatic commitments. We lose sight of the fact that Jesus' past work on the cross is an ever present fountain of redemption to be gained by faith in "future grace." We lose sight of the fact that our lives truly and without equivocation and confusion depend on us trusting all of God's promises. Jesus did not come just to help us get along better in this life while we wait for heaven. Jesus came to redeem a people from the guilt and power of sin, and it would be this redeemed people who will enter life to come and do not perish. We will be justified by faith in all of God's grace, past, present and future.

21. Daniel Fuller shows faith in what God promises for the future with Abraham's justification in Genesis 15 and 17. Abraham believed God's promise for the future and was reckoned righteous by that faith. Unity of the Bible p.272. "Paul also interpreted Genesis 17:17 in this way. His use of Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:22 shows not only that God fulfills his promises and blesses people on the basis of the forgiveness of their sins but also that they go on enjoying this forgiveness so essential for receiving God's blessings only as they persevere in believing him. Then in verses 23-24 Paul emphasized that this future component of faith must also exist for Christians today in order to enjoy forgiveness."