



SAVED BY FAITH

QUEST LESSON G-5

The Problem: The Bible's message of justification by faith in Jesus Christ has been explained in many different and contradictory ways by Bible students and church organizations. All agree that salvation of a sinner is impossible without the grace of God and the faith of the individual. But the relationship between grace and faith, and the results of God's saving work in life are quite differently understood. This lesson will focus on the Bible's teaching regarding justification, sanctification, and victory over sin.

The relationship between justification, sanctification, and Christian perfection has been discussed by Bible students for centuries. Many theologians have given very slight attention to the Bible definitions of these terms, choosing rather to read their own understandings into them or to repeat the ideas expressed by earlier uninspired writers.

What is understood by justification will inevitably influence the definitions of sanctification and perfection. Throughout the Christian era, there have been many different interpretations of justification. As an introduction to our Bible study, we will consider the three most influential views in the history of the Christian Church: (i) the standard Roman Catholic position; (ii) the Reformation view; (iii) the post-Reformation Protestant understanding.

I. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC POSITION: Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-74) is the most influential Roman Catholic theologian. "The RC Church has accepted the substance of St. Thomas's teaching as its official doctrine." (The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 1353).

Aquinas defined justification as an infusion of grace that repairs or transmutes the soul of man so that now it has the power to do good works. The immortal soul within man is, as it were, recreated by the infusion of divine grace. The result is that man has the natural ability, in and of himself, to perform in a way acceptable to God.

Thomas Aquinas wrote in his famous Summa Theologica: "Now He so Rants for natural creatures that not merely does He move them to their natural acts, but He bestows upon them certain forms and powers, which are the principles of acts, in order that 'they may of themselves be inclined to these movements, and thus the movements whereby they are moved by God become natural and easy to creatures, according to Wisd. 8:1: 'she... ordereth all things sweetly.' Much more, therefore, does He infuse into such as he moves towards the acquisition of supernatural good, certain forms or supernatural qualities whereby they may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good; and thus the gift of grace is a quality." (Part I of Second Part, Question 110, Article 2). "In the infusion of justifying grace there is a certain transmutation of the human soul, and hence a proper movement of the human soul is required in order that the soul may be moved in its own manner." (Part I of Second Part, Question 113, Article 3).

This means that, because of grace, a divine quality, is infused or injected into the soul of man, the soul is now naturally righteous having the capacity to perform good works. The emphasis is upon the immortal soul within man being reformed so that it is righteous. The terminology and concepts are borrowed from the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and applied to Christian theology.

The Council of Trent (1545-63) "was the most impressive embodiment of the ideals of the Counter-Reformation." (The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 1373). Its decrees express the doctrinal beliefs of official Roman Catholicism. On the question of justification, its definition "was modeled upon the pattern found in Thomas." (Reinhold Seeberg, The History of Doctrines (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 77S 1895, B98), Vol. 2, p. 433.)

The decree on Justification accepted at Trent may be considered in three parts: (a) Preparation for justification; (b) Definition of justification; (c) Increase of justification:

1. Preparation for justification, according to Trent, is not merely a matter of God's grace leading the individual to repentance, but of the sinner's own will co-operating with grace, projecting him towards justification. The Council taught "that God justifies the impious by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and when, understanding themselves to be sinners, they, by turning themselves, from the fear of divine justice whereby they are profitably agitated, to consider the mercy of God..." [Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1877, 1919), Vol. II, p. 93; quoting the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent]
2. Definition of justification: Like Aquinas, Trent defined justification as an inner renewal of the soul. "This disposition, or preparation, is followed by Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust becomes just..." (Schaff, p. 94). This re-creation of the soul within man takes place at baptism: "... the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which [faith] no man was ever justified..." (Schaff, p. 95). At baptism, "the charity of God is poured forth, by the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of those that are justified, and is inherent therein: whence, man, through Jesus Christ, in whom he is ingrafted, receives, in the said justification, together with the remission of sins, al] these [gifts] infused at once, faith, hope, and charity." (Schaff, p. 96). Even so, no one can be thoroughly certain that his sins are forgiven and that he is justified. (Schaff, p. 98-99).
3. Increase of justification: According to Roman Catholic theology, Justification is never complete for the believer. Trent taught that "they, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified..." (Schaff, p. 99). The justified man has the ability to do works that are meritorious in the sight of God, to improve upon his level of justification. (Schaff, p. 101).

II. THE REFORMATION VIEW: The two leading sixteenth-century Reformers were Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-64). On Scriptural grounds, both rejected the Roman Catholic concept of justification. They opposed the idea that man can predispose himself towards justification, the concept of infused grace, the belief in the transmutation (re-making) of the soul, the notion that: justification is never complete, and the teaching that the justified man is capable of doing meritorious works. Luther and Calvin saw justification as involving two inseparable aspects: (i) The legal or forensic aspect involves God's forgiveness of the believer's sins and the crediting of Christ's righteousness to his account. (ii) The experiential aspect involves the new birth experience by which the believer is born again. This experience includes Christ's gift of His righteousness to the believer by the Holy Spirit. The soul is not reformed so that it becomes inherently righteous. The Holy Spirit within the believer's heart is his righteousness. A few quotations from Luther and Calvin illustrating their teaching on these two points will be given:

1. The legal or forensic aspect of justification:

Luther: "To be justified includes that idea, namely that we are considered righteous on account of Christ. Nor is any sin, either past or a remainder that is left in the flesh, imputed to us, but as if it were nothing, removed in the meantime by remission." [Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), Vol. 34, p. 153.

Calvin: "A man is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgment of God he is deemed righteous, and is accepted on account of his righteousness... He, on the other hand, is justified who is regarded not as a sinner, but as righteous, and as such stands acquitted at the judgment-seat of God, where all sinners are condemned. As an innocent man, when charged before an impartial judge, who decides according to his innocence, is said to be justified by the judge, so a man is said to be justified by God when, removed from the catalogue of sinners, he has God as_ the witness and assertor of his righteousness. Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ." (Institutes of the Christian Religion, III, 11, 2-3.)

2. Justification as a heart experience; the new birth:

Luther: "Natural motion is our motion, but this movement of justification is the work of God in us, to which our propositions refer." (Luther Works, XXXIV, 177).

[Explaining what is meant by the righteousness of God being outside of us]. "The phrase is grammatical. To be outside of us means not to be out of our powers. Righteousness is our possession, to be sure, since it was given to us out of mercy. Nevertheless, it is foreign to us, because we have not merited it." (Luther's Works, XXXIV, 178)

"Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ... Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life." (Luther's Works, XXVI, 130; commenting on Galatians 2:16).

"Faith takes hold of Christ and has Him present, enclosing Him as the ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God accounts as righteous." (Luther's Works, XXVI, 132).

"But so far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that He lives in me and I in Him. What a marvelous way of speaking! Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ's; nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit. Since Christ lives in me, grace, righteousness, life, and eternal salvation must be present with Him; and the Law, sin and death must be absent." (Luther's Works, XXVI, 167-168).

"Therefore we teach as follows: 'Man, although you may fast, give alms, honor your parents, obey the magistrate, be subject to the master of the house, etc., you are not justified through this. This message of the Law, "Honor your parents" (Ex. 20:12), does not justify either when it is heard or when it is performed. Then what justifies? Hearing the voice of the Bridegroom, hearing the proclamation of faith when this is heard, it justifies. Why? Because it brings the Holy Spirit who justifies. (Luther's Works, XXVI, 208).

Calvin: "Hence I often repeat, that Christ has been in a manner set before us as a fountain, whence we may draw what would otherwise lie without use in that deep and hidden abyss which streams forth to us in the person of the Mediator. In this way, and in this meaning, I deny not that Christ, as he is God and man, justifies us; that this work is common also to the Father and the Holy Spirit; in fine, that the righteousness of which God makes us partakers is the eternal righteousness of the eternal God, provided effect is given to the clear and valid reasons to which I have averted.

Moreover, lest by his [Osiander's] cavils he deceive the unwary, I acknowledge that we are devoid of this incomparable gift until Christ become ours. Therefore, to that union of head and members, the residence of Christ in our hearts, in fine, the mystical union, we assign the highest rank, Christ when he becomes ours making us partners with him, in the gifts with which he was endowed. Hence we do not view him as at a distance and without us, but as we have put him on, and been ingrafted into his body, he deigns to make us one with himself, and, therefore, we glory in having a fellowship of righteousness with him." (Institutes of the Christian Religion, III, XI, 9-10.)

III. THE POST-REFORMATION UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION: Since the Reformation, many Protestants have followed the Biblical interpretations of Luther and Calvin on the question of justification. They have recognized the Reformation view as a revival of the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Among these are Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White wrote: "The great doctrine of justification by faith, so clearly taught by Luther, had been almost wholly lost sight of; and the Romish principle of trusting to good works for salvation, had taken its place." (The Great Controversy, p. 253.)

Other Protestant interpreters have chosen to follow the concept of justification as taught by Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560), Luther's contemporary, who modified Luther's interpretation of Paul. Describing Melancthon's understanding of justification Reinhold Seeburg wrote: "Justification is conceived strictly as a forensic [legal] act, and hence clearly discriminated from renewal... Even here, in the doctrine of justification, Melancthon's conception varies from Luther's form of presentation. According to Luther, the Spirit works faith through the word. Faith is both the principle of a new life

and the organ for apprehending the forgiveness of sins. To justification belongs the begetting of faith and the new life, as well as the forgiveness of sins... This was also the position taken by Melanchthon in the Augsburg Confession and the

Apology... Now faith seems to arise before the bestowal of the Spirit and before regeneration. Faith apprehends the purely forensic decree of justification. And because this occurs, the Spirit is also granted to the individual for his regeneration. The inseparable connection which is in Luther always maintained between regeneration, justification, and sanctification is thus broken." (The History of Doctrines, Vol. II, p. 360.)

Thus, in later life Melanchthon departed from Luther on the definition of justification. Multitudes of Protestants have followed the views of the later Melanchthon, thinking that they are being true to the Reformation. In fact, they are espousing a post-Reformation interpretation. The understanding of justification as a purely legal declaration of God in heaven excludes the new birth experience as part of God's justifying act. This view sees justification as what God does for us in heaven, not anything He does in the believing human heart. Hence in this view, justification does not cause sanctification (holiness). They are two separate (although simultaneous) acts of God. Sanctification is not viewed as present holiness in Christ. It is only growth in holiness which is never complete in this life. God's people will go on committing sin, which must be confessed and forgiven, until the second coming of Jesus.

This lengthy introduction has been thought necessary so that the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of justification can be placed in its correct historical context. The remainder of this study will focus on Bible teaching, demonstrating the truth of the Reformation position on justification, and revealing additional insights on the questions of sanctification and total victory over sin.

Objectives

First, we observe the Bible teaching that justification is God's legal act of forgiving our past sins.

Second, we view justification as the bestowal of Christ's righteousness upon the believer by the Holy Spirit (the new birth experience).

Third, sanctification is considered as present holiness in Christ.

Fourth, sanctification is seen as growth in holiness in Christ.

Fifth, Christian perfection is presented as total victory over sinful acts for Christ's faithful people before the second coming of Jesus.

I. Justification As God's Legal Act Of Forgiving Our Past

The legal aspect of justification is divine forgiveness for sin. The Apostle Paul identified justification and forgiveness, and the sixteenth-century Reformers emphasized his teaching.

The Word

1. What teaching of Paul demonstrates that forgiveness and justification are one and the same thing? Acts 13:38-39; Romans 4:6-8.
2. How did Jesus establish that God's forgiveness is not just a legal matter taking care of the past, but also deliverance from the dominion of Satan? Luke 4:18.
3. What is the relationship between redemption and forgiveness? Colossians 1:13-14.
4. What was David's concept of forgiveness? Psalm §1:1,2,7,10.

Explanation: When God justifies the sinner, He forgives his past sins. Then the sinner stands before the Lord as though he had never sinned. Acts 13:38-39 may be literally translated from the Greek: "Therefore let it be known to you, men and brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, and from all things from which you

were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, all those who believe in this man are being justified." The obvious intention is to identify forgiveness with justification, the law was given to take away human guilt; it was given to point out sin. Thus, the law is a standard of righteousness, not a means of forgiveness and salvation. Only by belief in Christ can anyone be forgiven for his past sin. On the cross Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and when we confess to Him by virtue of His sacrifice, we are forgiven (1 John 1:9).

This act of justification is a legal act of God, because He wipes out the guilt of our past misdeeds. As a court judge, he decides that we are innocent since Christ's suffering and death have paid our penalty.

Romans 4 gives another name to justification. Paul calls it imputation of righteousness. This is Christ's righteousness being counted for us because we have accepted Him as Savior and Lord. Verses 6-7 identify imputation of righteousness with forgiveness. Thus, justification and forgiveness are one and the same thing.

Ellen White explained justification quite Biblically when she wrote: "Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. Through faith, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a loyal subject of Christ Jesus, not because of an inherent goodness, but because Christ receives him as His child by adoption." (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, 1070).

But God's forgiveness is not just a legal matter. It not only takes care of the past, it cleanses our hearts from sin. Quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus emphasized that His work was "to preach deliverance [Greek = *aphesin* which means "forgiveness"] to the captives" (Luke 4:18). The last phrase of the same text reads literally, "to send forth the crushed in forgiveness." When Jesus forgives our sins, He delivers us from the dominion of Satan. This is not just something that happens in heaven. It is our experience of being released from the power of sin. Paul taught the same truth when he identified deliverance from "the dominion of sin with redemption and forgiveness (Colossians 1:13-14).

Ellen White's teaching on this issue is thoroughly consistent with Scripture: "God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart." (Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 114.) "To be pardoned in "the way that Christ pardons is not only to be forgiven, but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind," (Review and Herald, August 19, 1890).

Relevance: Justification is forgiveness. God's forgiveness is both a legal act and cleansing of the sinner's heart from sin.

II. Justification As The Bestowal Of Christ's Righteousness

The New Testament teaching is that justification is the new birth experience by which the Holy Spirit transforms a life by coming into the heart and driving the sin away.

The Word

5. How does Christ justify or save us from sin? Titus 3:5-7.
6. In his epistle to the Galatians, how did Paul explain the part of the Holy Spirit in justification? Galatians 2:16,20; 3:2-3.
7. What happens to a believer when he is justified by faith? Romans 10:6-10; compare 8:3-4.
8. How is the righteousness of Christ bestowed upon us in justification? Romans 8:9-10.
9. What other term is used for God's gift to the person whom He justifies? Romans 3:24.

Explanation: The Bible teaching is that justification (salvation from sin) is always by grace alone; it is never the result of human effort. It is Christ's work for and in the believer who responds to the drawing of the Holy Spirit. Writing to Titus, Paul pointed out that Christ saved the believing Christian not because of his own human works but by "the washing of rebirth" (Titus 3:5). The Greek word translated "regeneration" (*paliggenesia*) means rebirth. Paul adds that salvation is by "the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (verses 5-6). This new birth experience, which saved us, is then defined as justification. The Greek of verse 7 translates literally: "... so that

having been justified by his grace we might be heirs according to the hope of eternal life." The result of justification (salvation) is that we are heirs. God justified or saved us was by the new birth experience.

Jesus' message to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3), was just another way of explaining what Paul later called justification. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming a life (Galatians 3:2-3), it is the law of God being written on the heart of the believer (Romans 10:6-10), rendering him a righteous person. It is Christ bestowing Himself upon the believer by the Holy Spirit, so that now righteousness lives in the heart because Christ lives there (Romans 8:9-10).

Justification is Christ's gift of grace to us (Romans 3:24), What is grace? It is the power of Christ bestowed upon the believer making him spiritually acceptable to God and able to work in a manner that He approves. (On grace see: 1 Corinthians 1:4-5; 2 Corinthians 9:8,14; 2 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 13:9). No wonder Paul taught that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Romans 1:16). It is because the "righteousness of God" is "revealed," or bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit, that we have power in our lives. Justification is that bestowal!

Relevance: The New Testament does not teach that justification occurs only once in the life of the Christian. The bestowal of Christ's righteousness by the Holy Spirit is a daily experience for the believer. Every day he invites Christ to come into his heart, bestowing His righteousness and power. In this sense, we need a new birth experience (justification) every day.

III. Sanctification Present Holiness In Christ

After something has been bestowed upon us, we then possess it. Justification is Christ bestowed. Sanctification is Christ possessed. Justification is Christ coming into our hearts every day. Sanctification is Christ dwelling in our hearts every day. Justification causes sanctification. Holiness (sanctification) in the heart is the result of Christ's gift of Himself to us by the Holy Spirit.

The Word

10. Consider the following Bible texts as evidence that sanctification is an experience of holiness already possessed by the true believer in Jesus Christ. In the space provided, write in the part of the text that makes the point. Check other translations as well as the King James Version.

- a. Acts 26:18
- b. Romans 1:7 (without the supplied words)
- c. Romans 15:16
- d. 1 Corinthians 1:2
- e. 1 Corinthians 6:11
- f. Colossians 2:10

11. How is the believer in Jesus Christ sanctified? 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1-2.

Explanation: Not all English translations of the Greek text render the tenses of the verbs completely accurately. For example, Acts 26:18 translates literally, "... and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith that is in me." Romans 1:7 does not say, "called to be saints," as in the King James Version. It simply says, "called saints." The word "saints" (hagiois) means "holy ones." The believers in Rome were already holy in Christ. In that sense they enjoyed sanctification as present holiness in Christ. They had that experience because they were justified believers who had received the born-again experience given by the Holy Spirit. Since Christ had come into their hearts by the Holy Spirit, they had holiness in their hearts. As long as they possessed Christ, they possessed sanctification.

Romans 15:16 translates literally, "... having been sanctified by the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians 1:2 speaks of the Corinthians as "having been sanctified by Christ Jesus, called saints." They were spoiling the experience that Christ had given them, driving away the Spirit from their hearts by harboring feelings of bitterness and division. But they had been washed, justified, and sanctified already. 1 Corinthians 6:11 uses the past tense of the verbs. Colossians 2:10 says literally, "And you have been made complete in him," or "You have been made perfect in him." The moment we accept

Christ the divine miracle of justification (the new birth) takes place, and we are then complete in Him. This is salvation, the qualification for eternal life. Because Christ, who is holy, lives in our hearts, we have holiness now and we have eternal life now (John 3:36; 1 John 5:11-14).

Sanctification is always the gift of the Holy Spirit to our hearts. It is never the result of our works. God does not reward our works by giving us His holiness. He gives us His holiness as the power for good works. Like justification, sanctification is always by grace alone, never by human effort. Of course, we will strenuously exert our wills to constantly choose Christ rather than sin, but our exertion is an act of faith. It does not make us holy, nor does it earn God's gift. We receive his gift as a free bestowal of his grace, and this gift makes us holy people.

Relevance: You may have the blessings of sanctification, present holiness in Christ, at this moment. As you receive Christ into your heart by the Holy Spirit you have the gift of His holiness. You cannot receive the holy Christ into your life without partaking of His holiness. The thief on the cross was qualified for heaven at the moment He accepted Christ. At that point he had "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). And we too "might be partakers of his holiness" (verse 10).

IV. Sanctification Growth In Holiness In Christ

Though we enjoy the blessing of present holiness in Christ, we are still fallen human beings with propensities to sin. It is possible to fall away again into sin if we depend upon self instead of abiding in Christ (John 15:5). Sanctification as growth is the process by which we grow spiritually stronger as we yield our lives to Christ every day, turning away from the urges of our fallen humanity.

The Word

12. What great hindrance to holiness in Christ did Paul recognize? 1 Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5:16-17.

13. What does the New Testament teach about the need for constant spiritual growth? 1 Thessalonians 3:12 4:3; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Peter 3:18.

Explanation: Paul's struggle with his fallen humanity is clearly explained by Ellen White: "Paul's sanctification was a constant conflict with self. Said he: 'I die daily.' His will and his desires every day conflicted with duty and the will of God. Instead of following inclination, he did the will of God, however unpleasant and crucifying to his nature." (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 4, p. 299). An inclination to sin is not sin. Because Paul refused to follow the inclinations of his fallen humanity, choosing rather to rely upon the indwelling power of Christ, he was a victor in the battle with evil.

Sanctification is growth because the believer must every day receive the power (the righteousness) of Christ to control his fallen self. He must learn to rely totally upon the perfect righteousness of Christ bestowed, and not upon his own unaided effort. He must be justified (born again) every day, as the means of constant spiritual growth. The power of one's fallen humanity is weakened as the power of Christ constantly subdues it, and the holiness which is Christ's gift today becomes the habitual experience of the believer.

Relevance: The Lord wants us to overcome our besetting sins by dependence upon Him. The joy of the new birth experience (justification) can be maintained as we retain our relationship with Christ and allow Him to conquer sin for us. Holiness now can be holiness perpetually if we surrender daily to the holy Christ. The tendency for our fallen humanity to assert itself and take us away from the Lord can be subdued by the mighty indwelling Holy Spirit, and we can grow constantly more like Jesus.

V. Christian Perfection Before The Second Coming Of Jesus

Sanctification as growth in holiness is to result in victory over all sin before Jesus comes. This is not our achievement; it is Christ's gift. The power is justification; the result is sanctification and total victory.

The Word

14. What is the standard upheld to us in the New Testament? 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16.
15. What are Christ's people to be like spiritually before His second advent? Ephesians 5:25-27.
16. What kind of works will the justified and sanctified believer perform? Revelation 3:2-5; 19:7-8.
17. When will our fallen humanity be taken from us? 1 Corinthians 15:49-54.

Explanation: The New Testament standard is perfect holiness in Christ. The evidence is that the Lord wants His people to be free from all acts of sin before his second advent. He does not tell us that we are not saved until we have come to the end of the process of spiritual growth. We enjoy the blessings of salvation now! We grow spiritually because Christ lives in our hearts. But genuine Christians who want above all else to serve the Lord have a constant battle with sin. The Lord promises us that, if we will abide in Him, relying on His presence and power in our lives, He will give us total victory over sin. Then we will be as He wants His Bride to be: "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27).

Christ wants our works to be perfect in the sight of heaven (Revelation 3:2; compare 19:8). This does not mean that we will cease to be fallen human beings with inclinations to sin before Jesus comes. It means that, despite the tendencies of our fallen humanity, and the imperfection with which all of our works are tinged, we will stop sinning before Jesus comes. Not all imperfection is sin! Everything we do is imperfect because we are imperfect bodies and minds living in an imperfect world. But not everything we do is sin. (See John 15:22, 24; Romans 14:23). When our works are the result of our faith in Christ they are accepted by heaven, despite their human imperfection. Martin Luther put it Biblically when he wrote: "Works that result from the Word and are done in faith are perfect in the eyes of God, no matter what the world thinks about them even if you should be merely a an or an infant's nurse." (Luther's Works, Vol. 3, p. 318).

This does not mean that God ever accepts or excuses sin. Imperfect works that are wrought by faith He accepts. But never does he excuse sin. Quite the contrary, before the close of probation God's people are to be victors in the battle with sin. Since the Lord is willing to constantly bestow Himself upon us in justification, and dwell within our hearts as the means of our sanctification (holiness), we have all the necessary power to be overcomers. To deny the possibility of victory over all sin is to contradict the Lord who says that He "is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24), and who promises that with every temptation He will "make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). When the Lord says that He is able to bring all our thoughts under the control of His Spirit, why should we doubt Him (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). He offers us power for total victory. How can we do otherwise than accept His offer?

Relevance: Have you found Christ bestowed (justification) to be your power for victory over sin? You may: have present holiness and constant growth in holiness as you receive Him into your heart by the Holy Spirit daily. This experience can only result in that complete victory that is the qualification for the seal of God (Romans 7:1-3), given to those who will meet the Lord without seeing death. Like Enoch of old, they will be translated to heaven as a holy people because they have allowed Christ to infill their minds and hearts completely. Justification is the constantly available power; sanctification is the immediate and long-term result; total victory over sin is the final end of the process of growth to be the experience of God's people before the close of probation.

Will you join us in receiving Christ now as the source of our spiritual power?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Justification is only a legal declaration in heaven.
 - b. You can never say that a Christian believer is genuinely holy.
 - c. Justification is Christ bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit
 - d. No one who does not have the holiness of Christ will see the Lord
2. Discuss: How would you answer the person who argues that, even though he sins constantly, he is covered with the umbrella of justification?