

Understanding Grace, Justification, and Sanctification

Justification and sanctification are at the center of God's gracious plan of salvation and are the essence of our witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. While justification and sanctification may be viewed as distinct topics, in reality I believe they are elements of a single divine process that qualifies us to live in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Justification and sanctification are the fruit of the Atonement's "infinite virtue," which virtue we also refer to as mercy or grace. ...

Because of "the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice," Jesus Christ can satisfy or "answer the ends of the law" on our behalf. Pardon comes by the grace of Him who has satisfied the demands of justice by His own suffering, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). He removes our condemnation without removing the law. We are pardoned and placed in a condition of righteousness with Him. **We become, like Him, without sin. We are sustained and protected by the law, by justice. We are, in a word, justified.**

Thus, we may appropriately speak of one who is justified as pardoned, without sin, or guiltless. For example, "Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world" (3 Ne. 27:16; emphasis added). Yet glorious as the remission of sins is, the Atonement accomplishes even more. That "more" is expressed by Moroni:

"And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot" (Moro. 10:33; emphasis added).

To be sanctified through the blood of Christ is to become clean, pure, and holy. **If justification removes the punishment for past sin, then**

sanctification removes the stain or effects of sin.

...

"And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever" (2 Ne. 2:5).

With nothing more, by virtue of the Fall and our own disobedience, the law condemns us to temporal and spiritual death.

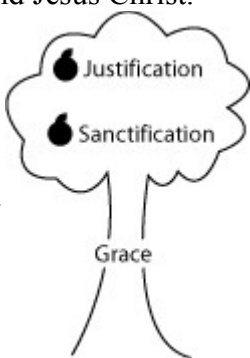
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This marvelous pardon that relieves us of the punishment that justice would otherwise exact for disobedience and the purifying sanctification that follows are best described as gifts, or the gift of grace. "His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth" ("The Living Christ," 2). Given the magnitude of the gift of grace, we would never suppose, even with all the good we could possibly do in this life, that we had earned it. It is just too great. "We know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do," says Nephi (2 Ne. 25:23). It is, and will always be, in truth, the gift of God through His divine Son.

But, as Nephi implies, there is something we can do, something that all who are accountable must do. To have effect, the gift must be accepted: "For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift" (D&C 88:33).

Thus, **it is not that we earn these gifts, but rather that we choose to seek and accept justification and sanctification.** Since the Savior paid for our sins and satisfied justice for us, we become debtors to Him rather than to justice. We must therefore meet the stipulations He has established for forgiveness and cleansing. Otherwise, He withdraws His proffered mediation, and we are left to deal



alone with the demands of justice, lacking the means to become pure. One must choose Christ to receive what Christ offers.

How does one choose Christ? We noted earlier Lehi's declaration that it requires "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (2 Ne. 2:7). Nephi elaborates: "Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost" (2 Ne. 31:17). ... the gift of grace or mercy is received as a believer repents, enters into the specified covenants, and receives the Holy Ghost. This action of acceptance on our part opens the door for the process of justification (remission, or pardoning, of sins) and sanctification (cleansing from sin) to work in us—something we may refer to as being born again ...

Justification and sanctification are accomplished by the grace of Christ, which grace is a gift to man based on faith. But our moral agency is also a necessary element in this divine process. We must will to repent and act to repent. We must elect to be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost, and we must elect to remain loyal to our covenants thereafter. To receive the gift we must act in the manner He has ordained.

It is clear that our acceptance of the gift of grace is not a single act occurring at a single moment in time, but is instead an ongoing process and obligation. The words of the Savior in 3 Nephi that we have already referred to make this point:

"Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled [with the Holy Ghost]; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

"And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, ...

"And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end" (3 Ne. 27:16–17, 19; emphasis added).

We are warned:

"There is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God;

"Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation;

"Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also" (D&C 20:32–34).

In due course, Jesus Christ will judge the world, both those who have rejected His grace and those who have accepted His mercy:

"There is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

"But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored to his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

"For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved" (Alma 42:22–24).

To be classed among the truly penitent, random acts of obedience will not be adequate. We must properly enter into the covenants and persist in keeping them to the point that our expectation of salvation is affirmed by the Holy Spirit of Promise (see D&C 132:7, 19). It is not simply the promise of obedience in our contracts with Deity that brings grace, but the performance of our promises: "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:13).

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None of us, of course, is perfectly obedient, and thus we rely on our baptismal covenant to bring a remission of sins after baptism just as it has done for our lives before baptism. We rely on repentance to reinvigorate that covenant, to bring the Holy Spirit and, with it, atoning grace. The process of cleansing and sanctifying through the baptisms of water and of the Holy Ghost can be continued

weekly as we worthily partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The tokens of the Atonement, the bread and water, become symbolic cleansing agents and the sign of our renewed covenant, similar to the symbolism of the water in which we were immersed at baptism. It is as if we were being baptized afresh and the door once again opened for the Holy Spirit to enter, "that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]" (D&C 20:77). Thus, we need not fear judgment. Having our sins remitted or pardoned and our garments spotless through the blood of Christ, we can imagine we hear the voice of the Lord in the Day of Judgment saying, "Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth" (Alma 5:16).

This personal persistence in the path of obedience is something different than achieving perfection in mortality. Perfection is not, as some suppose, a prerequisite for justification and sanctification. It is just the opposite: justification (being pardoned) and sanctification (being purified) are the prerequisites for perfection. We only become perfect "in Christ" (see Moro. 10:32), not independently of Him. Thus, what is required of us in order to obtain mercy in the day of judgment is simple diligence. As the Prophet Joseph Smith counseled from the dank prison of Liberty, Missouri: "Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed" (D&C 123:17; see also Mosiah 4:27).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once expressed our obligation this way:

"Everyone in the Church who is on the straight and narrow path, who is striving and struggling and desiring to do what is right, though far from perfect in this life; if he passes out of this life while he's on the straight and narrow, he's going to go on to eternal reward in his Father's kingdom.

"We don't need to get a complex or get a feeling that you have to be perfect to be saved. ... The way it operates is this: you get on the path that's named the 'straight and narrow.' You do it by entering the gate of repentance and baptism. The straight and narrow path leads from the gate of repentance and baptism, a very great distance, to a reward that's called eternal life. ... Now is the time and the day of your

salvation, so if you're working zealously in this life—though you haven't fully overcome the world and you haven't done all you hoped you might do—you're still going to be saved" ("The Probationary Test of Mortality," Salt Lake Institute of Religion devotional, 10 Jan. 1982, 12).

When we stand before the Savior to be judged of Him, it will be "according to our works and the desires of our hearts" ("The Living Christ," 3; see also D&C 137:9). ...

The Savior offers to all who will have faith and accept it, the gifts of being justified or pardoned before the law and also being sanctified—that is, being made spotless and holy. There is no other name, nor way, nor means whereby such redemption may occur (see Mosiah 3:17; Moses 6:52). And truly His grace is sufficient to achieve it (see Moro. 10:32). So my witness to each member of the Church, and our witness to the world, is as recorded in the scripture of this last and greatest dispensation:

"And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true;

"And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength" (D&C 20:30–31).

(Excerpts from Justification and Sanctification, by Elder D. Todd Christofferson, June 2001, Ensign)

Baptism is for the remission of sins; it is the ordinance, ordained of God, to cleanse a human soul. Baptism is in water and of the Spirit and is preceded by repentance. The actual cleansing of the soul comes when the Holy Ghost is received. The Holy Ghost is a sanctifier whose divine commission is to burn dross and evil out of a human soul as though by fire, thus giving rise to the expression baptism of fire, which is the baptism of the Spirit. Forgiveness is assured when the contrite soul receives the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the ordinance, ordained of God, in which baptized saints are privileged, repeatedly and often, to renew



the covenant of baptism. Those who partake worthily of the sacramental emblems, by so doing, covenant on their part to remember the body of the Son of God who was crucified for them; to take upon them his name, as they did in the waters of baptism; and to “always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them.” (D&C 20:77.) Thus those who partake worthily of the sacrament—and the same repentance and contrition and desires for righteousness should precede the partaking of the sacrament as precede baptism—all such receive the companionship of the Holy Spirit.

Because the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle, they thus receive a remission of their sins through the sacramental ordinance. *Through this ordinance the Lord puts a seal of approval upon them;* they are renewed in spirit and become new creatures of the Holy Ghost, even as they did at baptism; they put off the old man of sin and put on Christ whose children they then are.

(Elder Bruce R. McConkie, A New Witness for the Articles of Faith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985])