



Justification and Sanctification

Sermon for August 7 2022

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Ephesians 2:1-10

We are studying the New City Catechism this year, because it is a great summary of what we believe as Christians. I'm going to read Question 32 now, and then let's read the answer together.

Question 32: What do justification and sanctification mean?

Justification means our declared righteousness before God, made possible by Christ's death and resurrection for us.

Sanctification means our gradual, growing righteousness, made possible by the Spirit's work in us.

Justification and Sanctification are two big words that are very important to understand. They describe how the power of God can resurrect human beings spiritually, and then help us walk in new ways. The world is full of pain and brokenness. The world needs hope today. It's dangerous to be a Christian in Egypt and in Pakistan. It's dangerous to be a Uyghur in China. The war in Ukraine isn't over yet. There is violence in El Salvador, and Ethiopia, and Congo.

These things are not new. 2000 years ago the world was filled with disease, fighting, and persecution. People felt helpless then, like many of us feel helpless today. Only resurrection power can heal the sick, end the fighting, and provide a solution to problems too big for us. Here is an outline of what we will see in this passage of scripture.

Point 1--Verses 1-3: We are sinners, and spiritual death is our problem.

Point 2--Verses 4-9: We are spiritually resurrected in Christ by grace alone (Justification).

Point 3--Verse 10: We live differently because we have new life (Sanctification).

I am going to read Ephesian 2:1-10 in English and then pray. If you are using a tablet or you speak one of the four languages on the screen, you can read the text in the beautiful language that God blessed you with.

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins.

2 You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world.

He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.

3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature.

By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much,

5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.

(It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

6 For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

7 So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed.

And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.

9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

10 For we are God's masterpiece.

He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth. Jesus, we worship because you are full of mercy

and love. Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God. Amen.

Point 1--Verses 1-3: We are sinners, and spiritual death is our problem.

What do you think about verses 1-3? If Paul the evangelist was trying to make Christianity attractive, do you think this was a good way to speak? Paul says that we are all dead sinners, and children of wrath. A message like that won't get a lot of likes on Facebook.

Paul says in verses 1 and 2 that "you were dead" and "you used to live in sin." Is Paul saying that other people are sinners but Paul is not a sinner? No. In verse 3, Paul includes himself. Paul wrote "3 All of us used to live that way."

What does Paul mean when he writes that we were dead? How could we be dead if "we used to live in sin" and were "following passionate desires"? Paul was talking about spiritual death here. We all are going to die physically one day. But physical death is the result of hearts that are spiritually dead.

God told Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:16-17:

16 "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden,
17 except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

When Adam and Eve chose to turn away from God, they died spiritually on that same day. Their souls were separated from God, that's spiritual death. It's a broken relationship with our Creator. That's why Adam hid in the garden after he sinned. Adam and Eve became numb to the Holy Spirit. They were spiritually deaf and blind. Their hearts became selfish and self-absorbed.

Spiritual death was the separation of their souls from God. That spiritual death caused their eventual physical death. Original sin, physical suffering, and death are things we inherited from Adam and Eve. The sickness in our bodies began with sickness in our hearts.

Do you think Paul offended some people, by saying these things? Most people don't want to hear these things. We don't want to believe that we are sick and blind and dead. But there must be a reason for all this pain and death and fighting and oppression in the world. The reason is us. Human beings are doing these things. Why? Why do people hurt each other in such terrible ways?

Do you remember playing "follow the leader" as children? You all run along in a line after the leader, and everyone has to

jump, or somersault, or skip, or crawl. Everyone does the same thing the leader does. We all follow someone. I like to think I am independent, but we all follow someone or something.

Adults play follow the leader, too. Look at verses 2 and 3 again:

2 "You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil--the commander of the powers in the unseen world.

He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.

3 All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature.

By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else."

The apostle Paul is trying to help us see that none of us are truly independent. We follow the trends and habits of the world. We let the devil influence our mind and behavior. We follow the passionate desires of our sinful nature. I know this is hard to hear. But if we are honest, we know we have a problem controlling ourselves. I do things I don't want to do. I say things I know I shouldn't say. Is that true in your life? Do you have a habit that's hard to break?

We can't change when we are following the wrong leader. Jesus is offering the opportunity for a new life, and a new direction. If we are willing to let him be our leader and Lord.

Point 2--Verses 4-9: We are spiritually resurrected in Christ by grace alone (Justification).

Let's look now at the good news. Because God rescues anyone who knows they need His help. Verse 4 says, "But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much"

Verse 4 begins with two of the most precious words in the Bible, "But God." Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. Many years later, Joseph told his brothers: "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." (Genesis 50:20) Psalm 73:26 says, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart"

God save helpless people. That's what Paul is helping us see in verses 1-3. Paul explains how helpless we were when God intervened.

One more example from scripture is when Paul preached about Christ in the city of Antioch. In Acts 13:29-30 Paul wrote, "they took Jesus down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead"

Jesus the perfect Son of God was crucified and died. But God raised him from the dead. And because he loves us, God raises us from the dead also. Why would he do that? Look at verse 4 and 5 again.

4 "But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much,

5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead."

Does it say, "because you went to church"? Or "because you tried hard to be good"? Why does God make us alive in Christ?

Verse 4 says it is because of God's love. Verse 5 says, "It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!"

And then Paul repeats this in four different ways in verses 8 and 9:

1. God saved you by his grace when you believed.

2. And you can't take credit for this.

3. it is a gift from God.

4. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done.

If you read these words and understand them, I think the point is very clear. God saves sinners--that is the gospel in three words. Justification is something God does for us. We cannot do it for ourselves. God is the judge of the universe. Only the judge can announce if someone is guilty or innocent.

This is the good news of justification. When God the Father looks at you, he doesn't see your sin anymore. The Father looks at you, clothed in the righteous deeds of his Son. The Father sees an innocent person when he looks at you. That's what Justification means. We will talk about sanctification in a few minutes, but there is some more amazing good news about justification.

Let's talk about resurrection. Jesus was dead but God raised him from the dead and exalted Him. We also were dead, but God raised us up with Christ, and exalted us with Him. That's what verses 4, 5, and 6 are telling us. Because I was spiritually dead in sin, God had to resurrect my heart so I could see Jesus follow Him.

In verses 4-6 there are four verbs joined with the word "us."

Verse 4: "God loved us."

Verse 5: "he gave us life."

Verse 6: "he raised us and seated us."

When you trusted in Christ your soul rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and was seated next to Christ in heaven. God is saying we have a seat by him, in heaven. This is very surprising, because grace is always surprising.

Imagine that you got fired from your job for stealing \$10,000 from the company. But after you are fired, the president of the company calls you and says: "I forgive you for what you did, I want you to come back to work for us. And I'm giving you a promotion, you are now a vice president. Also, I have a very big house with 20 bedrooms. Come live at my house. And there is one more thing, you are going to be my son now. I have put your name in my will, so everything I have will be yours."

That sound unbelievable, right? Who would take an undeserving, deceitful person and forgive him for stealing from the company? Who would promote a thief to a higher position, and also make him a son and heir? Who would do that? God would do that. God did that for you, my friends. Spiritual death is separation of your soul from God. But when he raises you up and seats you with Christ, you are a member of God's family forever. You are his sons and daughters--princes and princesses.

Being resurrected with Christ means you don't have to play follow the leader anymore with your own desires. You don't have to follow the world, or Satan. Being seated with Christ means he now rules over my life. You still have free will, but it is now truly free. You have the freedom to follow Him.

That is what sanctification is. God the Father declares that you are innocent. And now you have the opportunity and responsibility to live differently.

Point 3--Verse 10: We live differently because we have new life (Sanctification).

Most of the verbs in this passage are past tense. We see that God saved us, God made us alive. God raised us and seated us in the heavenly places. Your salvation, your spiritual rebirth and resurrection are done. Past tense. What is it like to be resurrected? Do you think anyone asked Lazarus that? Do you think Lazarus lived the rest of his life differently, after Jesus raised him from the dead?

The Social Security administration records births and deaths in America. Every year, they make mistakes. This is what happened to Laura Brooks from Virginia. Because of a mistyped social security number, Laura Brooks was declared dead and stopped receiving her social security checks. They said her account had been closed, because she was dead.

Social Security said they would reopen Laura Brooks' accounts if she could prove she was alive. Are you alive? Are you spiritually alive? How would you prove it? Look at verse 10.

10 "For we are God's masterpiece.

He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

God took our dead souls and made us into works of art. We are made new and fresh and beautiful by the power of the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

If you have been reborn, can anyone see it in the way you live? Are there visible signs of life that other people can see in you? People who have been spiritually resurrected should be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving. Reborn people don't get drunk. They walk in love and sexual purity. They submit to one another and serve one another.

Sanctification is how you prove you are spiritually alive. Sanctification is not how you get saved. It is the fruit that grows in the life of a saved person.

God saves us first, then we follow him. Throughout Scripture God always tells us first what He has done for us, before he tells us what we should do in response. All of the things God expects you to do flow from what He first did for you.

Did you notice something in verse 10 about that the good works we do? "we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." Even the good things you do are part of his plan. That's why "none of us can boast about it." The good things we do in this world should be done with a humble attitude that remembers where we came from. It was our sin that crucified Jesus. This is a good summary of the gospel: Guilt, Grace, Gratitude.

Guilt: Why is the world full of death and hatred and persecution? Not because of those bad people out there. No, because of bad people like us in here. Jesus died for my sin, your sin, the sin of the whole world.

Grace: "but God!" God saved us by grace alone. God called us, God resurrected us. God seated us with Christ in heaven. We are his masterpiece.

Gratitude: Now "we can do the good things God planned for us long ago." We get to tell the world the good news. Justification makes our sanctification possible. We are free to follow Christ and live for him. We will actually look more and more like Christ, the longer He is the leader we follow.

Do you remember what Jesus said about Lazarus after he was raised from the dead? Jesus said: "Unwrap him, and let him go." Beloved in Jesus Christ, you have been unwrapped! Jesus has said this about all of you: "Unwrap them, and let them go!"

Christ unwrapped you from sin and death and made you alive. He has "let you go" and made you free to walk in new ways and do good works and enjoy new life.

Our sanctification journey is visible evidence of the gospel. We can be trophies of grace and proof to the world that God resurrects sinners and remakes them from in the inside out.

The more you believe and understand your justification, the more you will walk in sanctification. That's why you will hear the good news of the gospel every week at this church. Because we forget it. We find it hard to believe that God loves us so much that he would save rebels like us. But it is true, and it is the fuel that energizes us to live new lives of love and obedience. Justification is the foundation of sanctification. Please trust in what Jesus has done for you, so you can live for him. Would you please pray about this with me?

Jesus, we could not save ourselves. We didn't even want to be saved, because we liked being independent. But it was a lie. We are easily enslaved by our own desires and the influence of the world. Thank you for giving us new life and new direction! Thank you for bringing our souls back from spiritual death. Now help us live for you. Holy Spirit, please help us make better choices this week. Help us live in a way that brings honor and glory to God the Father. We pray this in the name of Jesus the Son. Amen.