

Orthodoxy: Justification & Sanctification

New City Catechism Q.32 What do justification and sanctification mean?

Answer: 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.

To those who are elect exiles . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. - 1 Peter 1:1-2

It is important that we understand and experience justification and sanctification as gracious inseparable but distinct blessings from God. Justification is an act of grace and sanctification is a work of grace. Justification is declarative concerning the believers legal standing before God. Sanctification is a continual work of grace concerning the believers transformation of life. Justification is by faith in the righteousness of Christ outside of the believer. Sanctification is by faith in the righteousness of Christ graciously worked in the life of the justified believer. Justification is the priestly work of Christ that declares the believer not guilty freeing him from guilt and the penalty of sin. Sanctification is the kingly work of Christ bringing his abiding union to the believer by the Spirit to rule in his life for his glory. Justification declares, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1). Sanctification promises, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6). Therefore, justification is on-the-spot and forever, and sanctification is growing toward completion.

How do these inseparable but distinct gracious blessings work in our daily life? A horse never finishes a race running backwards. A Christian runs from the start to the finish by the bit and bridle of grace. A believer is reckoned by God as forgiven of all his sin and acceptable in the righteousness of Jesus Christ by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's where all the children of God begin their new life in union with Jesus Christ. Now because of this everlasting lovingkindness and every morning new mercies in union with Jesus Christ, a believer spends the rest of the race running by repentance and faith for the joy that is set before them - becoming like him who lived, died, was raised, and who reigns for us. We don't become like him and then he accepts us. He accepts us and then he makes us like him. We participate by grace through faith from start to finish.

James "A Practical Christianity": An Overview

We will begin a Sunday morning sermon series on the book of James Sunday April 19th. I encourage you to read this overview and follow with us through this series.

The Letter of James is written by the half brother of Jesus of Nazareth. In the Greek his name is translated Iakobos which is the Hebrew Ya'akov, which we translate in English, Jacob. So, this letter comes to us from Jacob who was the half brother of Jesus, which we refer to as "James".

We learn of him from Luke's writing in Acts 12 and 15, and also from Paul's letter to the Galatians (1&2). Following Jesus' resurrection and ascension James became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. This church was primarily Jewish Christians. This church went through many difficulties during James' leadership. They

experienced a famine that led to great poverty, and they also experienced persecution from Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Through all of this James was known as a pillar and peacemaker of the church leading with wisdom and courage until he was tragically murdered. This book gives us the legacy of wisdom and practical Christian teaching that James delivered to the first century church in Jerusalem.

The book begins like a letter as he greets the Christian Jews living outside the land of Israel. He does not begin by addressing problems in a particular church as Paul often does in his letters. He begins by delivering to the church the great wisdom of God that is useful to the church in his age and in any age to come. His goal is to challenge how Christians live their lives out in the grace of God in Christ.

He is influenced in his writing by the teaching of Jesus on life in God's kingdom. His writing is closely linked to Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" which we find recorded in the gospels. Another key influence in James' writing are the Proverbs. He often uses material from Proverbs 1-9. He would have grown up with this book influencing his life, and now he sees Jesus as the personification of Wisdom (Proverbs 8). All his wisdom teaching has Jesus as the life of that wisdom. He writes with short wisdom speeches full of metaphors and one liners that are easy to remember. In this manner of teaching he is calling the church to live a practical Christianity according to Jesus' summary of the TORAH, to love God and our neighbor as ourselves.

The body of the book is found in chapters 2-5 in 12 teachings calling God's people to a wholehearted devotion to the way of Jesus. All together these teachings can stand alone, but are connected through key words and themes. He begins by focusing on favoritism and love. Because we tend to show favoritism to people who can benefit us we neglect people who can't. This leads us away from the kind of love we're called to by Jesus (2:1-12). He goes on to show what genuine faith does and does not look like. For example if we say we have faith in God but we neglect the marginalized people in our world our faith is dead. Genuine faith always abides by Jesus' teaching on love to our neighbors (2:14-26). He also helps us to see in the three sections of the letter how important our words are. He shows us how messed up it is when we use our words to inflict pain on others and then we offer praise to God (3:12). In another section he shows us how we judge people and then go talk about them behind their backs (4:11-12). We also tend to use our words to distort the truth to our own advantage (5:12). James is showing us that Jesus was right when he said our words open up a window into our hearts (Mt. 12:34). James also tells how God's kingdom dismantles the divisions we create by wealth and social status (4:13-17; 5:1-6). He warns us about the arrogance of wealth that creates in us the idea it will be around forever. He tells us the truth that our wealth will one day rot just as we will. In contrast he tells us that our life in God's kingdom is to be lived by patience and hope for Jesus' return (5:7-11). This inspires a life of faith that is evidenced by prayer (5:13-20).

These sections are all introduced by the opening chapter (1:1-18). This chapter may seem like a series of one liner wisdom, but it is actually meant to introduce you to the content of the letter in chapters 2-5. God's desire is to make his fractured children whole. But he does not do this by simply picking Humpty Dumpty up and putting him back on the wall. All of God's children must be patient through trials and suffering knowing that God is using these difficulties to remake us into his God glorifying image bearers. We must see our hardships through God's wisdom that is given us when we ask. This true wisdom is given us as we trust him when we are afraid and anxious. He is teaching us if an economic downturn or a sickness is causing us to struggle with anxiety, try and view this trial as a gift from a good God who is using this to make us whole by trusting him alone. Our wealth and health are all going to allude us at some point in time. Therefore, our trials in these areas are meant to thrust us upon God's generous trustworthy heart for his children. This is God's way of creating a new humanity in Jesus Christ, and he means to use his word, the perfect law of God, to guide us to this wholeness by faith in Jesus Christ. He is freeing his children through these trials and his wisdom to live as we were meant in love to our neighbor as ourselves as we are wholly devoted to God.

This is what the book of James is all about, and I trust that our 12 week study through the book of James will be used of God to make his church whole in Jesus Christ.