

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AS PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

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What do many of us see when we look at our congregations? Church and communion attendance leaving more than just a little to be desired? Contributions for kingdom work not merely limping, but even lagging behind? A list of delinquent members, souls for which we are responsible, not shrinking, but even growing in spite of faithful efforts? Cases which call for brotherly admonition and church discipline never out of mind or off our heart? Members willing to expend time and effort for their Lord by serving on boards and committees harder and harder to flush out of the church roster? Need we go on? The view is hardly one we would call exciting or exhilarating, is it?

What do we see when we look at our classrooms? What's happened to many of the homes from which our children come? Where are those old fashioned families composed of both a dad and a mom? Where dad is truly the head of the house and teaches God's Word in all simplicity to his household? Where the nurture and admonition of the Lord are chief concerns in child raising? Where parents live out Christ's love in daily life as role models for His and their children? Where the brutal attacks of the world against fledgling Christians are countered and cushioned by home's safe citadel? Need we go on? It shows, doesn't it, in the children who sit before us Monday through Friday, on Saturdays and Sundays?

And what do we see when we look at our Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod? Poor attendance at worship services and infrequent communion participation? Low enrollment in Bible classes of any kind and lack of lay ministry? Maintenance growth and back door losses? Misunderstanding of mission and ministry? Need we go on? We all have heard the needs reported from our 1987 synod convention and we know something must be done.

Inseparable and Noninvertible

Justification - what is it? Need we ask, much less answer? Who of us hasn't heard and studied that doctrine before, in fact, a number of times? The word "justification" interestingly enough is not defined in Holy Scripture as we are accustomed to having words defined in Webster. Only three times does the Word occur in all of Scripture (Rom. 4:25, 5:16, 18). But what it stands for, the doctrine it represents, is woven throughout Scripture and presented more clearly than any other. Justification means simply "acquittal." It is God's declaration to the sinner that his sins are completely gone and that there is absolutely no charge left against him. Whenever the Bible speaks of redemption, of forgiveness, or deliverance from sin, that's justification talk. And we can never hear or study enough of it.

So we turn briefly to just one section of Scripture, to 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 where Paul wrote, "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. 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. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Earlier in verse 14 and 15 Paul had three times said the same thing, that Christ died for all men as their Substitute and bearing their guilt. Then in verse 15 he added that Christ "was raised again" by the Father, who thus put His "Amen" on the Son's triumphant shout "It is finished."

Now in verses 19-21 Paul turned to the term "reconciliation" to speak further about this glorious truth. Reconciliation signifies a change in relationship, from enmity to a state of friendship. How this change came about is clearly stated in verse 19. It was because God "was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." Instead of putting sins to their charge, God placed them on His son who paid for them in full. In God's computer the world's "debt disk" is now blank, completely erased. On God's part there are no longer any debts charged to men. Though man, till he is brought to faith, still is and continues to be

God's enemy, God has become his Friend. Because of Christ's payment God is at peace with the world, yes, with every person who ever lives in the world.

God has also given the Gospel as His gift to proclaim to the world, not what He intends or is willing to do, but already has done for it. The Gospel is the proclamation, as someone described it, of "forgiveness," of an objective reality which stands whether man believes it or not. Unbelief can reject, but not nullify this forgiveness. Finally unbelief is the only sin which damns since it rejects what God has done in Christ. Faith is the receiving hand and merely receives. Even this hand has had its origin always in God and in the Gospel and justifies, not because of action or attitude, but because of what it holds, the merits of Christ.

What an important truth, full only of constant joy and certain hope for the sinner! Justification is at the heart and center of all of Scripture and the correct understanding of this doctrine opens the door to the entire Scripture. Thank God for giving the doctrine of justification to us in all its fullness. Pray God that we never lose it and that its refrain be heard loudly and clearly in all our teaching.

Sanctification is another important word in Scripture. Those who do some counting claim to find the verb and noun some 135 times. This term is used often to describe the total work of the Holy Spirit in us. In a narrower sense it refers to the spiritual growth which follows justification by faith. This is the work of the Spirit in leading the believer step by step in the renewing of the image of God, step by step in the righteousness of daily life. To put it another way, both negatively and positively, it is the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's heart whereby the Christian daily puts off more and more the Old Adam and daily puts on more and more the New Man. Other names for this important work are "growth" (2 Peter 3:18) and "renewal" (Romans 12:2).

The believer's life of sanctification is not something optional, but necessary. It is one of the purposes for which the Holy Ghost has called us by the Gospel to faith in Christ. God who justified us not only expects, but demands a life of sanctification from every believer. Isn't that what Paul was stating clearly in Ephesians 2:10 with the statement, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"? Or in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "It is God's will that you should be holy" and in 4:7, "God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life?" We have no choice but to dedicate our lives to Christ's service. How can we do otherwise?

Note carefully from where this necessity comes. It comes from God's work of justification. No longer are works a frantic, useless effort to appease God and erase our sins, but a joyful response to what a gracious God has pronounced upon us and now brought into our lives. The question "Must I?" has been changed into the joyful assertion, "I want to." Now we have gratitude in action, visible faith which, as Luther once put it in his inimitable way, "cannot just lie on our heart like foam on beer." Our faith in Christ has to find its way into our daily lives. Like the penitent thief on his cross, the jailer at Philippi in his home, Levi out of his tax booth, the inseparable result of justification is sanctification, a living and doing for the Lord. Paul knew it well, ever since that day on the Damascus road. He told the Corinthians, "If anyone is in Christ - a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). He didn't write, "ought to be" or "should be," but stated it as an accomplished fact. He also told those Corinthians how come when he wrote, "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again" (5:14, 15). Like water flowing from an artesian well, sanctification flows from justification.

Clearly this important doctrine is not meat which should be reserved only for the strong in faith, but milk for every Christian's diet.

The close connection between justification and sanctification is obvious from the above. We simply cannot have one without the other. We may separate them theologically, but never essentially or chronologically. Sanctification follows justification always, nor can there be any sanctification without justification. These two doctrines are and always will be inseparable.

But noninvertible! Sanctification always follows justification, not the other way around. Justification is the diesel tractor which pulls the semi trailer of Christian life. To re-hitch sanctification ahead of justification is to slap God in the face and send man on hell's collision course. To unhitch sanctification from justification is to

let justification sit idle and finally to lose it. Though inseparable, justification and sanctification are and always must remain noninvertible.

Have we always in our preaching and teaching shown the inseparableness of these two? Afraid of losing what God gave back to us in the Reformation and apprehensive lest we pietistically stress “Christ in us” at the expense of “Christ for us,” have we always connected justification and sanctification as forcefully as we might? Rather than preaching sanctification as a joyous necessary response, is it an Achilles tendon which we hesitate to stress and stretch? Luther, the great Reformer, did not hesitate. We’ve memorized and taught his words, but they are more than words. That’s living truth to be lived out in daily lives, that Christ redeemed me so that “I should be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.”

It’s time to put our Reformation heritage into action. Let’s proclaim boldly that Christ came to pay for our sins *and* to break the power of sin in our lives. Let’s not separate the two as if one comes first and the other sometime or slowly later. God doesn’t work that way. He doesn’t justify us to set us on ice in some freezer, but to heat us up for a holy life. We dare not separate faith from life and rob God’s grace of its power. Christ has freed us *from* sin’s penalty and for a life of service.

But let’s not invert that order. In our desire for a faith which lives we may unwittingly begin to switch the emphasis from that which faith holds and which makes it live to that which faith does. “What to do” can become the thrust and leave the “how to” behind in the dust. Christ, instead of being the inexhaustible source behind our sanctification, can be made only into the shoehorn to help slip us into the shoes of daily life. Many have fallen into this trap of inverting justification and sanctification. Pick up those evangelical books which line the shelves in the religious bookstores in the malls and you’ll see. At best such an approach reduces the ten foot tall Captain of our salvation into a ten inch pygmy. At worst it turns Him into a lawgiver, another Moses laying down requirements for discipleship. Let our central focus remain where it belongs, not on the Christian’s actions in the present, but Christ’s action in the past on Calvary. Then sanctification will be there. It will have to be for it is inseparably linked with justification.

Done And Doing

Justification is done. God has done it all for us in Christ. There are no degrees or steps. We are not partly holy and partly not, with some sins canceled and others still charged. And it’s totally ours through faith whether that faith is weak or strong. Like our fingers, so weak faith may drop more quickly this treasure, but no one ever stands with it half in or half out of the hand. The joyous certainty of our salvation depends not on the condition of our faith at the moment, but on God’s solid gold promise that “the result of one (Christ’s) act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18). In this world there is nothing more surely, more completely done, than our justification.

How different with sanctification. Living the Christian life is truly a doing and so often a painfully slow doing. Some days it goes better than others; we take four steps forward in holy living. Other days it seems the bottom drops out and we take six steps backward. Some days we can stare those pet sins right in the eye and resolutely say, “No.” Other days those sins scuttle us without our ever firing a shot. Never does the doing end in this life of sanctification on earth.

Didn’t we say that in Christ we *are* new creatures? How come then this lifelong, painful struggle to be new creatures? It’s because of the Old Adam, that old sinful nature we inherited from our original set of parents. Before we were regenerated, the Old Adam was in the saddle in our hearts, riding us hard, not even having to use his spurs to urge us on in a life of sin. Then came the Gospel in Word and Sacrament through which the Spirit worked faith, punched our Old Adam on the jaw and pushed him right off the saddle. New life holds the reins now. Love for God replaces hatred; trust takes over the place of doubt; walking after God flourishes willingly in place of taking orders slavishly from the devil.

But our Old Adam doesn’t give up. He’s bruised and battered. He’s lost his seat in the saddle of our heart, but he’s not content to lie in the trail dust. He attacks again and again, seeking to regain what he has lost. Though his strength is broken and he’s lost absolute sway over the heart, he’s still a formidable foe. Here’s no

annoying fly we can swat easily aside, no 90 pound weakling in whose face we can kick sand with impunity. He's an out and out foe who's out to regain complete control. No wonder Paul used strong terms like "crucify" (Galatians 5:24) and "put to death" (Romans 8:13) when writing what we are to do with this foe. All our life this fierce battle between the Old Adam and the New Man rages. All our life we are saint and sinner at the same time.

The classic description of this grim battle was penned by the Apostle Paul in Romans 7. Under the Spirit's guidance he wrote, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work in my members" (7:18-23). Wounded and weary in the battle, too, we feel like crying out with Paul, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (7:24). But thank God with Paul, we have the same assurance of victory "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7:25).

How does victory come in this daily battle with the Old Adam? Paul has already told us. The work which the Gospel began cannot be finished by the Law. The burly Old Adam is never defeated by a brisk raking over the coals of the Law nor by a fierce raining down of Law's fire and brimstone on his unruly head. Scripture reveals and our own experience reinforces the truth that the Law can only arouse and antagonize the Old Adam and at best condemn him. The Law cannot change his sinful nature nor challenge him to Christian living. The Old Adam needs to be drowned, not dressed up; removed, not improved. And that requires a power far greater than what the Law has. Spiritual life both begins in and is nourished only by the Gospel's power.

This does not mean that we have no use for the Law. When Paul wrote in I Timothy 1:9-10, "We also know that the Law is not made for good men but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and, perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers" he was stating a glorious truth: No longer can the Law condemn us with punishment because Christ has paid for all our fracturings of it. No longer can the Law coerce us with its demands because Christ has fulfilled them all. He has set us free from the Law. And if in this world we were totally new creatures; if in this life we would be able to shake off every last shred of the Old Adam, we would need no Law. Then we'd have back completely that wonderful image of God. Then we'd know completely God's will and be completely willing to follow it. Then perfect fear, love and trust would flourish in a perfect relationship with God. And then Law would be superfluous. Because such is not the case this side of eternity, we still need the Law. In fact, as Luther put it, "If we cast the Law aside, we shall not long retain Christ."

Our Old Adam needs the Law as a curb. He's just as ungodly and sinful, just as much a lawbreaker and a rebel, just as much a murderer and an adulterer, just as much a liar and a perjurer as an unbeliever. He comprehends nothing but the Law and cowers before nothing but the fear of punishment. This curb can restrain him somewhat from sin and reduce in size the roadblocks he would set up in our New Man's service to God, but he can do nothing to save or sanctify him. The New Man needs none of this. He is ruled by the Gospel and "is not like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you" (Psalm 32:9). For the New Man Christ's love is the all persuading, pervading and powering force.

There's another use of the Law, a major one, for both believer and unbeliever. That's the use we commonly call the mirror. Like some mirror, the Law exposes sin's ugly blemishes, both on and beneath the skin. In this uncompromising mirror heart, head and hands are clearly exposed. Thoughts, words and deeds are closely examined. The result is the "knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Who of us can gaze into that relentless mirror and not confess with Isaiah, "All of us have become like ogle who is unclean" (64:6)? Important though this use of the Law is, yet it cannot save or sanctify us. Recognition of disease is not healing of it; nor is sin's exposure its eradication. Healing flows only from the message of justification. Cleansing is found only in that

“fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins.” But there can be no appreciation for this fountain when the malady is not felt.

What a delight for the child of God, healed and made whole by the Gospel, to look into the mirror and see himself “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). The reaction is that question of willing gratitude, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Again, if the Old Adam were cremated and his ashes hauled completely away, the question would be superfluous. But the Old Adam remains, lurking here and there inside us, downplaying if not darkening our Father’s will. So the believer needs the Law in a third way, as a rule, a guide in which the Father reveals His way in which His children are to walk. In a dark world of dead end streets and detours, His people very much need this “Lamp for their feet” and “Light for their path” (Psalm 119:105). Light on the path, however, is not power for walking the path. Such power can come only, as the Psalmist reminds us, when God has “set our hearts free” by the Gospel (Psalm 119:32).

If we do not remain keenly aware of this ongoing, ever present conflict between the Old Adam and the New Man in the Christian, we will not be able to apply Holy Scripture properly to God’s people. Always as we minister to God’s saints, we must remember that they are neither totally New Man nor totally Old Adam. Sometimes they will be more one than the other, but always in this world of sin both remain. Our task is to apply Law and Gospel properly. With wisdom from our own immersion in the Word and with guidance from the Spirit we will strive to use the Law to reprove the Old Man without discouraging the New. And we will use the Gospel to comfort and strengthen the New Man without giving license to the Old. That’s a tall task, indeed! How have we fared? Too much Law and we are legalists. Too little Law and we have a misunderstanding of the believer’s dual nature. To those whom God has entrusted into our care we have to proclaim the Law, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the Gospel. The message of justification, that beautiful new “Paid in full” means nothing on a blank piece of paper. To the extent that sin’s debt is felt will this message be treasured. Satan cleverly uses the side door when he has been shut out of the front one. Since he cannot deny the “done” of justification, he tries to diminish our appreciation of it by “sanitizing” sin’s dirt in the believer’s life. When there are spots on the water glass or the silverware and I complain, my wife usually answers, “That’s clean dirt. It’s gone through the dishwasher.” But in the serious matter of sin every speck counts. And believers need to be told so in no uncertain terms.

Nor does it help to play the old comparison game as to who is cleaner because someone else is dirtier. The Pharisee, we will recall, tried it in the temple. He compared himself with other men, instead of with God, and we remember what Jesus said about him. The 20th century believer needs the mirror of the Law held boldly and closely before him, not just from a safe distance or with fog on its surface. He needs to hear about “sins” in particular, not just “sin” in general. He needs to feel the Law’s relentless finger searching for, locating, and then pressing down hard on his sore spots so that the cry is wrenched from deep inside him, “MY sins, oh, MY sins.” Then there will be the shuddering of the shattered heart, “Please help me. I am a poor, miserable sinner. I have sinned against You in thought, word and deed.” More important, then those blessed words, “Our heavenly Father has had mercy on us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins” will be the sweetest ever heard and eagerly sought after again and again. And then sinners, truly sanitized, will live more like saints.

The 20th century believer also needs clear preaching of God’s Law as rule and guide for life. In today’s world the difference between what God does and doesn’t want has been scribbled over and in some instances seemingly erased. “What feels good for me” and “what works for me” have become the guide for so many in life’s walk. Those who shepherd know from heart-wrenching experience how far this virus has invaded and infected God’s sheep. Not always aware of what God wills because of the unbelieving world around them and not always caring for what that will is because of the unbelieving heart within them, believers may stumble around instead of ahead on the path of righteousness. God’s ways need to be made known to the regenerate before they can walk them. Faith’s eyes need boldly to be shown the joyous ways of God’s commands. Let’s assist those “souls too apt to stray a stricter watch to keep” even as we point them to Calvary for the power to do so.

Justification is done, completely so. Thank God it is. God prevent that we ever believe or teach otherwise. Sanctification because of our dual nature will, this side of eternity, always be in the doing stage. God help us remember and remind fellow believers of this. God help us pray for them and for ourselves,

“We thank Thee, God, new life is ours,
New light, new hope, new strength, new powers;
This grace our every way attend
Until we reach our journey’s end.” (TLH 369:6)

Power and Progress

Sanctification is not only the negative doing of daily battle against the Old Adam. It is also a positive progress in putting on the New Man. Luther’s word’s about the Christian never reaching the state of “*sein*” but always being in the state of “*werden*” are familiar to many of us. Or as the translation reads, “To be a Christian does not mean to be in a state of perfection, but to be in a process of growth.” Among other things, this quote reminds us that there is to be forward motion in sanctification. Years earlier Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153 AD) said it this way, “To be in a standstill on the road to heaven actually means going backward.” Still years before him the Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Spirit, told the Thessalonians that he was giving thanks to God for them because, as he put it, “your faith is growing more and more and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing” (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Progress in faith and life is something about which Peter also wrote. In his second epistle he commanded his readers, “Grow (actually the Greek means ‘keep on growing’) in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18). To the discerning reader that sounds very much like the language of progress. More and more the New Man is to out point the Old Adam the daily slugfest. More and more he is to progress on the road to Christian living.

Scripture describes this progress in sanctification as a blessed cooperation between the Holy Spirit and the New Man. The New Man is not some puppet forced to jerk and dance as the Spirit pulls the strings. He is not some model airplane which swoops and dives as the Spirit works remote controls. The New Man is alive! He’s no longer dead and unresponsive. He’s alive and willingly responsive to the Spirit’s leading. Thus Paul urged the Romans, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness” (6:13).

Similarly Paul encouraged the Corinthians, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). How such cooperation comes about and how it is powered, Paul pointed out to the Philippians. He urged them, “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” and then immediately added, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (2:12, 13).

This cooperation, as Paul has pointed out, is not some equal pulling together in tandem of both the Holy Spirit and the New Man. Instead, the New Man can only work out what the Holy Spirit works in, as our fathers pointed out in the Lutheran Confessions. In the Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, they wrote, “From this then it follows that as soon as the Holy Ghost, as has been said, through the Word and holy Sacraments, has begun in us this work of regeneration and renewal, it is certain that through the power of the Holy Ghost we can and should cooperate, although still in great weakness. But this [that we cooperate] does not occur from our carnal natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Ghost has begun in us in conversion, as St. Paul expressly and earnestly exhorts that ‘as workers together with Him we receive not the grace of God in vain,’ 2 Corinthians 6:1. But this is to be understood in no other way than that the converted man does good to such an extent and so long as God by His Holy Spirit rules, guides and leads him, and that as soon as God would withdraw His gracious hand from him, he could not for a moment persevere in obedience to God. But if this were understood thus [if anyone would take the expression of St. Paul in this sense, that the converted man cooperates with the Holy Ghost in the manner as when two horses draw a wagon, this could in no way be

conceded without prejudice to the divine truths” (Article 11, paragraphs 65-67). The Spirit gives and powers. The New Man willingly serves, making the most of the gifts and the power received from the Spirit.

When’s the last time we gave our New Man a “spiritual check-up” or encouraged our members to do the same? From what the apostles and the church fathers have just told us we realize that such a check-up would not be out of line. How would our New Man answer if we were to use the following questions like some thermometer under his tongue or stethoscope to his chest: “Are you dying to sin? Are you living to righteousness? Are you striving to know better what pleases your Savior? Are you daily begging Him for strength to do what pleases him?” And please, let’s not beat around the bush, but make those questions as specific as we can.

In John 15:5 our Lord Jesus used a delightful picture to describe how sanctification comes about and grows. He said, “I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.” Branches grafted on the vine do not remain dead or even static. They are alive and growing. They produce fruit and then more fruit. They increase in strength and production. But only as the life-giving sap flows through them. It’s a cooperative effort the Savior describes. But note carefully the secret to fruit-bearing is “abiding in Him.”

This cooperative relationship is both rich tribute to God’s grace and weighty responsibility for the believer. That God should graft us on the Vine and send His power coursing through us - what grace! That God should use that power in us to grow some grapes for Him and then even stoop to accept those grapes, shriveled and stunted as they always are - what grace! That such grace should be a challenge for us to be as productive as we can be, through Him and for Him, almost goes without saying. Yet we need the reminder even as we remember also those important words, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.”

Grafted onto Christ, believers bear fruit, some more, some less. There is no such thing as a fruitless branch. The quantity of fruit may vary from believer to believer and even at different times in the same believer. In His parable of the Sower and the Seed the Master Himself taught that the seed does not produce the same measure in every case (Matthew 13:23). Nor dare we demand that it does. Were we to seek the same amount of fruit from the weak believer as from the strong, we might seem to suggest inferior grades of faith and rob those on the lower rungs of the certainty of their salvation. We might also promote loveless comparison and undue emphasis on works among those stronger in faith. But were we to leave the weaker Christian alone, unaided and unchallenged, we could leave the faulty impression that a branch can still be on the vine even though fruitless. What the Lord looks for and what the church needs to promote is ongoing growth for us all.

That means preaching sanctification. Faith’s appreciation and love’s gratefulness will look for guidance. They will welcome the clear directions of God’s commandments, and for the right reason, as ways to show thankfulness for grace freely received. How can grateful faith fear, love and trust God above all things? By thrusting His commands above all others, trusting His every promise and treasuring Him above all. How can grateful faith use God’s name correctly? By calling upon it in every trouble, remembering to say thank you, and praising it among the nations. How can grateful faith hold His Word sacred? By sitting at His feet in His house on Sunday and inviting Him into our house all week. How can grateful faith honor His representatives? By loving parents from whom we have received life and obeying those set over us. So we could go on. By protecting all life, including that of the unborn. By cherishing marriage, making our house a home, joyfully using our sexuality. By laboring for Him in all we do, wherever He has placed us, using the fruit of our labors for His glory and freely, for His kingdom. By harnessing our tongues for speaking the truth in love. By being satisfied with house and home, money and goods, content with what we have because in Him we have all. God’s people have been rescued from the hand ‘of their enemy, enabled to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness all their days (Luke 1:74, 75). But they need to be reminded.

How will progress in sanctification come? Not by tinkering and toying around with the Old Man. He’s dead and can grow nothing regardless how hard we prod or how winsomely we woo. The appeal has to be direct to the New Man which God has given us. Nor dare this appeal be Law disguised as Gospel. “It’s your duty” type of preaching may force-grow for a while what appears to be grapes. The threatening words “must” and “should” may ring loudly in the ear and lead to some quick-fix response. But fruit pleasing to God, fruit which

keeps coming and even increasing, is powered only by justification preaching, by the proclamation of what God has so richly done in Christ for the sinner. This message is the only means through which the Spirit works His miracles in people. This Gospel is still the “One Thing Needful” also when it comes to progress in sanctification.

We believe, don't we, that only as people are led deeper and deeper into this Gospel will changes occur in their hearts and lives? I hope so, because that's the only power God has given us and, therefore, that's the only power we need. But we do need to use that power to the best of our ability. What God has done for us in Christ is a headline to be shouted joyously from the rooftops, not a rumor to be spoken like some whisper in an alley. Nor is this some headline from the distant past to be recited dryly or reexamined from time to time. God wants His message of justification to live and breathe in the present. Paul displayed just such a tone when he joyously marveled to the Galatians, “Christ loves me and gave Himself for me” (2:20). We need to catch that tone, too. The message from the past is that beautiful “He did it for the sins of all.” The message in the present has to be “He did it for me. He did it for you.” Every sermon, every lesson needs that refrain sung in major key.

Let's also make every attempt to sing this heavenly song in appropriate and appealing ways. The needs of sinners never change with calendar or century, but their cultures do. The message those sinners need dare not change either, but we do have to bring it into their culture. That means we must carefully distinguish between message and method. Method can never replace the message and will do damage if it tries. On the other hand, method must constantly and carefully be scrutinized lest it stand in the way of the message.

God help us do what the church is to do and to do it to the best of our ability. The more we concentrate on proclaiming the justification of the ungodly, the more the sanctification of the righteous will follow and flourish.