

Faith in Justification and Sanctification

16. Define faith in biblical terms, explaining its relationship to justification and sanctification.

Defining Faith

- Dictionary definition: belief in, devotion to, or trust in somebody or something.
- Faith in God – A firm and certain knowledge of God’s good will toward us, which, being founded on the promise freely given in Jesus Christ, is revealed to our understanding and sealed in our heart by the Holy Spirit. – Institutes of the Christian Religion
- Faith is the noun πίστις (*pistis*) and believe is the verb πιστεύω (*pisteuō*) from the same root. Believing is the act of trusting something based on its truthfulness and reliability.
- Faith is a profound and multifaceted concept in the Bible, far more than mere intellectual assent. It is perhaps the most crucial component of Christian life, so essential that without faith, it is impossible to please God. See Heb 11:6.

The Nature of Faith

- Heb 11:1—Faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Faith is assured that what is hoped for will become a reality. It is convinced that the unseen promises of God will be fulfilled.
Heb 11:27 gives an example: Faith apprehends as a real fact what is not revealed to the senses. It rests on that fact, acts upon it, and is upheld by it in the face of all that seems to contradict it. Faith is a real seeing.
- Obedience is the inevitable manifestation of true faith. The biblical concept of faith must lead to obedience. “Believe” is treated as if it were synonymous with “obey” in John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life.”
- Faith is not a name or a picture, but a real principle; it is a working grace, and therefore obedience is called ‘the obedience of faith,’ Heb. 11:8. Faith does not only change a man’s state, but alters his nature; hence we are said to be purified by faith, Acts 26:18.
- Faith in Christ is a gift and is therefore non-meritorious. Eph 2:8-9
- All merit is in the object of our faith. He is the Faithful One. Synonyms are “dependable,” “reliable,” “trustworthy,” and “loyal.” God’s character of faithfulness speaks to his absolute honesty or integrity. He is truth. – John 14:6

Faith in Justification

- Faith is the instrumental cause of justification – Rom 5:22-24
- Faith is the gift from God – Eph 2:8-9
- Justification by faith introduces us to the grace in which we stand (Rom 5:1-2)

- “The doctrine of justification either presupposes or necessitates every other cardinal doctrine.” John MacArthur

Positional Sanctification vs. Justification

- Positional sanctification and justification refer to the same event—faith in Christ. It is called positional because believers are sanctified (set apart) unto God.
2 Thessalonians 2:13 — But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.
- Hebrews 10:14 — “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” The apostle is not speaking of practical perfection. Practical perfection does not come until believers are glorified. He describes believers as those who are positionally perfect in Christ.
- Justification is a one-time event occurring at the point of salvation. Our response – belief in the gospel message – results in the declaration of justification, the forgiveness of our sins, and the imputation of the righteousness of God to us. We are now set apart (positional sanctification) to God. We have been bought with a price – the precious blood of Christ (1 Cor 6:20).

Progressive Sanctification

- Progressive sanctification is the ongoing process of spiritual transformation in a believer’s life, defined as what occurs day by day as God transforms us by the Holy Spirit’s work, whereby we become in actuality what God has already declared true of us.
- Though believers now have the power to be victorious over sin’s dominion through Christ, their hearts are not totally purified. The penalty of sin is paid, its power is broken, but sin’s presence remains in the believer’s flesh and must continually be put to death.
- It is the will of God for the believer to be progressively sanctified.
1 Thessalonians 4:3–7 — For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*. ⁷ For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.
- As Martin Luther emphasized, “Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.” True, saving faith is living and active, immediately producing fruits of repentance and righteousness. If justification occurs, sanctification will surely follow, and the absence of sanctification suggests there was no genuine justification.
- Holiness (*hagiasmos*) is synonymous with sanctification (Heb 12:14 cf. Lev 11:45, Matt 5:48)

Westminster Confession – of Sanctification

- They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor 6:11; Acts 20:32; Phil 3:10; Rom 5:5-6), by His word and Spirit dwelling in them (John 17:17; Eph 5:26; 2 Thess 2:13); the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed (Rom 6:6, 14), and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified (Gal 5:14; Rom 8:13), and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces (Col 1:11; Eph 3:16–19), to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (2 Cor 7:1; Heb 12:14).

Grace in Salvation – Grace in Sanctification

- Salvation is by grace and sanctification is by grace. Romans 5:1-2, Gal 3:1-14; Eph 4:1-7; Col 2:6-7, Phil 1:27-30.
- Sanctification, just as much as salvation, begins with faith. Faith is our victory that overcomes the world, the flesh, and the Devil (1 John 4:4–5; 5:4–5; Rom. 6:1–8:14).
- We entrust ourselves to the good work that God has already accomplished in our hearts.
- Sanctification requires trust in God the Father, and it also demands abiding in God the Son. We are delivered from the bondage of sin through the power of our union with the indwelling Christ. (John 15)

Faith in Progressive Sanctification Means Cooperating with God

- In the progressive nature of sanctification, believers cooperate with God through active participation guided by the Holy Spirit. Progressive sanctification involves the Holy Spirit's work and requires a responsive involvement from believers (Phil 3:12-14, 4:11).
- Romans 12:1–2 — Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- “That faith in Christ is the root of all holiness,—that the first step towards a holy life is to believe on Christ,—that until we believe we have not a jot of holiness,—that union with Christ by faith is the secret of both beginning to be holy and continuing holy,—that the life that we live in the flesh we must live by the faith of the Son of God,—that faith purifies the heart,—that faith is the victory which overcomes the world,—that by faith the elders obtained a good report,—all these are truths which no well-instructed Christian will ever think of denying. But surely the Scriptures teach us that in following holiness the true Christian needs personal exertion and work as well as faith.” J.C. Ryle

Grace the Teacher

- Titus 2:11–14 - For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.
- Hebrews 12:11 — All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

A Case Study – The Galatian Church

- What is considered by most to be Paul's first epistle is to the Galatians. The book of Galatians is a fierce defense of faith alone as the sole instrument of justification—the principle of sola fide.
Galatians 1:6–7 — I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.
- Paul not only corrects a wrong view of justification but also speaks to how it also led to a wrong view of their sanctification.
Galatians 3:1–3 — You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? ² This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
- The believer is given the power through the Holy Spirit to walk in holiness

Knowledge of God is the key to Rejoicing.

- Those who know the great truths about God find it easy to rejoice; those with little knowledge of Him find it difficult to rejoice.
Phil 1:18, 2:17–18, 4:1, 4, 10; Rom 5:2; James 1:2-3.
- The joy of the Lord is our strength. Neh 8:10.

For Further Reading:

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The Role of Repentance in the Christian Life

17. Describe the role of repentance in beginning and continuing in the Christian life. Explain the importance of the doctrine of repentance for biblical counseling.

Repentance defined:

- The most common New Testament Greek verb for repentance is *metanoēō* (noun, *metanoia*), which means “to change one’s mind.” It indicates first of all that repentance involves acknowledging one’s sin.
- “Biblical repentance is not a mere change of thinking, though it does involve an intellectual acknowledgment of sin and a change of attitude toward it. Neither is it merely shame or sorrow for sin, although genuine repentance always involves an element of remorse. True biblical repentance is also a redirection of the human will, a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead. Thus, genuine repentance involves the mind, the heart, and the will.” – *Biblical Doctrine – A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*
- “The two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance” – Thomas Watson.
- Repentance is a pure gospel grace.
Romans 2:4 — Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?
- The first sermon that Christ preached, indeed, the first word of his sermon was “Repent” (Matt 4:17).
- Repentance depends upon a change of heart.
Ezekiel 36:25–26 — “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”
Joel 2:13 - And rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.
- “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” – 1st of the 95 theses by Martin Luther

Repentance vs. Remorse

- Repentance should not be confused with remorse. Remorse occurs when you are saddened by the consequences of your sin.
- Saul's disobedience demonstrates remorse in 1 Sam 15
 - "I did obey the voice of the Lord" – v.20. Partial obedience is not obedience.
 - "the people took *some* of the spoil" v.21 – Excuses for one's actions are given.
 - "please honor me now before the elders of my people (v.30). Selfish motivations.
 - "Samuel hewed Agag to pieces" – Complete destruction is required, paralleling our response to sinfulness in our lives.
- David's response demonstrates repentance (2 Sam 12, Psalm 51)
 - David is confronted with his sin (12:1-12)
 - "I have sinned against the Lord" v.13 (Acknowledgment of sin)
 - "Against You, You only, I have sinned" Ps 51:4 – Sin is first and foremost against the Lord.
 - Only the Lord can restore the repenting believer (Psalm 51:10-12).
 - "A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" – Repentance requires a humble heart (Psalm 51:17).
- "Whenever there is sin in his life, a counselee needs to confess it, rethink his way, and then seek to take a turn in the right direction. It is important, then, to understand that to ask a sinning counselee to change, you are not merely asking him to turn around and go God's way. Rather, you are *first* asking him to recognize the error of his way (as sin), to confess it, seek forgiveness, and then to want to do what God requires instead. The counselor must address *both* aspects of repentance, and not merely one or the other." – Jay Adams

The Nature of True Repentance

1. Sight of Sin – You must see yourself a sinner. Luke 15:17 (prodigal son); Luke 18:13
2. Sorrow of sin (Zech 12:10, Luke 18:13, Psalm 126:5, 2 Cor 7:9).
3. Confession of sin (1 John 1:9; 1 Cor 11:31).
4. Shame for sin (Ezek. 43:10, Luke 15:21, Jer 6:15).
5. Hatred of sin (Rom 7:13–15; Psalm 119:104). "Till sin be bitter, Christ will not be sweet."
6. Turning from sin (Jer 3:10, Eph 5:8, Isa 55:7; Acts 26:20).

Godly Sorrow: A Repentance without regret (2 Cor 7:10-11)

- 2 Corinthians 7:10–11 — For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.¹¹ For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what

zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

- What earnestness - The Greek word signifies a solicitous diligence or careful shunning all temptation to sin. The true penitent flies from sin as Moses did from the serpent.
- What vindication - The Greek word is 'apology'. The sense is this: though we have much care, yet through strength of temptation we may slip into sin. Now in this case the repenting soul will not let sin lie festering in his conscience but judges himself for his sin. He pours out tears before the Lord. He begs mercy in the name of Christ and never leaves till he has gotten his pardon. Here, he is cleared of guilt in his conscience and is able to make an apology [defense against the accuser] for himself against Satan.
- What fear - "A repenting person fears and sins not; a graceless person sins and fears not."
- What longing – The repenting believer desires to be with Christ, as everything desires to be in its center.
- What zeal – Zeal quickens the pursuit after glory. Zeal, encountering difficulty, is emboldened by opposition and tramples upon danger. Zeal makes a repentant soul persist in godly sorrow against all discouragement and opposition whatsoever. Zeal carries a man above himself for God's glory... Zeal animates spirit and duty. It causes fervency in religion, which is as fire to the sacrifice (Rom 12:11). As fear is a bridle to sin, so zeal is a spur to duty.
- What avenging of wrong – "A true penitent pursues his sins with a holy malice. He seeks the death of them as Samson was avenged on the Philistines for his two eyes."

Comforting the Repenting Sinner

- Your sins are pardoned. Luke 7:47, 1 John 1:9, Psalm 103:3-4
- The Lord says to the repenting believer, "I will remember their sins no more." (Jer 31:34, Micah 7:19).
- Our conscience can be at peace
Hebrews 10:22–23 — let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Impediments to Repentance

- Men do not apprehend that they need repentance (Rev 3:17)
- People conceive it an easy thing to repent (false repentance: sorry, sorry, sorry)
- Presuming thoughts of God's mercy (Psalm 130:4; Psalm 19:13).
- The pleasure of sin (2 Thess 2:12, Heb 11:24-25).
- Thinking that repentance takes away one's joy (Rom 14:17)
- Despondency – Joel 2:13, 2 Cor 1:3.

- Hope for impunity (no consequences) [Psalm 10:11].
- Fear or reproach (exposing oneself to the potential scorn of man).
- A love for the world (Luke 14:18-19).

Importance of Repentance in Biblical Counseling

- It represents a fundamental process of spiritual transformation. (Romans 12:1-2)
- Repentance is a change of mind about one's beliefs, attitudes, and behavior that involves sorrow about sin and issues in a change of lifestyle as outward evidence of a desire to be different:
 - Confessing sin to God and to others (the outward expression of godly sorrow).
 - Seeking forgiveness (the first step taken to remedy the situation).
 - Forsaking the sinful way (the next remedial step).
 - Beginning an alternative way of life that is pleasing to God (the last corrective step).
- Heart-motivated action, taken in order to please God (not to obtain some personal boon), is what he called for. "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance." (Luke 3:8).
- Many counselees must be brought to repentance before God so that they may be prepared for the changes that the Lord Jesus will make in their lives—both in their thinking and in their behavior. Too often counseling fails because the preparatory work of repentance has been neglected.
- The Lord addresses the severity of remaining unrepentant in your sin which can ultimately lead to church discipline (Matt 18:15–20).

For Further Reading:

MacArthur, John, and Richard Mayhue, eds. *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017.

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Adams, Jay E. *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.