

# The Trinity in Justification & Sanctification

(BY GEOFFREY BINGHAM)

God, the Triune God, will have His creation free from guilt, pollution and shame. The Three Persons who are in themselves ‘other person centred’ will look out to their creation and liberate the elect from the powers of darkness, the turmoil and the oppression, reconciling all things by the blood of the Cross. God loves the world and His Son is the propitiation for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world. A new heaven and a new earth will guarantee the new holy people, the Kingdom of Priests unto their God. To this end the Father, Son and Spirit do their work of justification and sanctification.

## INTRODUCTION TO US UNDERTAKING THIS STUDY

The themes of justification and sanctification should only be undertaken by seriously minded and morally responsible people who, recognising their own sinfulness, nevertheless are driven—in humility—to hear the word of God and take it to their hearts. Like Isaiah in the temple (Isa. 6) God’s holiness must strike at their hearts, and they be lost until they hear the words of grace, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven’. The nature of God requires justification and sanctification that the human spirit may live. Two quotes indicate the serious nature of God’s Law and Man’s predicament.

P. T. Forsyth<sup>1</sup> says:

But God’s holy law is His own holy nature, the principle of His own holy heart, the life action and norm of His moral personality, with no source or authority outside Himself, and no claim He could even wish to ignore or evade. To tamper with it would have been to deny His own soul. He loves it as He must love Himself, or His other self, His very Son, His Holy One, dearer to him than all men and all prodigals. A wound to that holy law of His Being is a stab to His own heart at least as keen and urgent as any love or pity He might feel to men.<sup>1</sup>

Luther says:

The Law of the letter is everything written with letters . . . This is the Law of works, the old Law, the Law of Moses, the Law of the Flesh, the Law of sin, the Law of wrath, the Law of death. It condemns everything, makes all men guilty, increases lusts, and slays; and the more spiritual it is, the more it does so . . .<sup>2</sup>

Only in the light of such Divine holiness will we begin to understand the dreadful infraction of Law that is ours, the horrible violation of the holiness of God Himself. Romans 3:19–20 lights up in view of this dawning terror of comprehension and understanding which could only come through the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–11):

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world be held accountable to God. For no human

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<sup>1</sup> The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ (NCPI, Blackwood, 1987), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> LCC 27, 35 [Geoff gives this reference, evidently meaning the Library of Christian Classics, but it is not correct as there are only 26 volumes in the series and those devoted to Luther, vols. XV–XVIII, do not contain the quote, at least not in this form.]

being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

This being convicted of sin, this uprush of terror at being guilty before God, is what brings existential knowledge of sin. All efforts at self-justification pale and are as unsubstantial as a wraith. The horror that exhausts the human spirit of all its self-proving arguments now brings man to the edge of his inner abyss, the abyss of death.

This is what holy Law does to unholy humanity. As Paul shows, there is no law given that can make alive (Gal. 3:21). Only the gospel can do that! That is why we now turn to the gospel. Yet, apart from Law, we will not turn to the gospel! This is what Paul means by Galatians 3:21–26 when he brings together both the covenantal promises of God—the gospel—and the lethal judgement of the Law:

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

In the ultimate, then, the Law has shut us up to the gospel! It has shut us up to faith, the faith which justifies, because it springs from the sight of the grace of God which provides propitiation for the dreadful infraction of Law. It is the propitiation for sins which Christ effects in his death which is the basis of our new life

This short introduction takes us to the heart of the matter: God, the Triune God, will justify us that by justification He may fulfil our sanctification which was His ultimate intention for us as Paul, Peter, and John would have us understand; ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him’ (Eph. 1:3–4); ‘chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood’ (I Pet. 1:2); ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure’ (I John 3:2–3).

This brief orientation to our subject brings us to the core of the justifying and sanctifying work of the Three Persons.

## **THE TRINITARIAN WORK OF JUSTIFICATION**

### **The Father the Initiating (Fontal) Justifier**

Romans 3:21–26 states the gamut of the justifying work of the Cross:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation [propitiation] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.

‘God put forward’ (*protheto ho theos*)<sup>3</sup> shows the Father to be the initiator, designer, appointer, presenter (cf. *JB, NEB, NIV*) of the justifying act of the Cross. The point is that the Father ‘sets forth’ in unmistakable, effective completeness that which satisfies Himself and justifies the sinner. Thus I John 4:10, ‘In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation [propitiation]<sup>4</sup> for our sins’. In his teaching of justification Paul employs Abraham (Gen. 15:6), Moses (Lev. 17:11), David (Ps. 32:1f.) and Habakkuk (2:4) to show God had long ago initiated justification by faith.

## **The Son the Effective Justifier of the Sinful and the Ungodly**

We saw that apart from Christ there is no justification, ‘But the Scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith’. This is because we are ‘justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation [propitiation] by his blood, to be received by faith’. In this pericope is contained the whole principle of propitiation which is Christ receiving the wrath of God<sup>5</sup> and His holy Law (cf. Gal. 3:10–14), and it first takes the form of Christ’s being ‘delivered to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification’ by the Father, whilst it is the Son ‘who loved me and gave himself [up] for me’, so that John can say (I John 2:2) ‘He *is* the propitiation [‘atoning sacrifice’, *NRSV*] for our sins’.

We do not have the scope here for showing the nature of that propitiation or the love of both Father and Son that is a mystery to be lived in.

## **The Holy Spirit and Justification**

I Corinthians 6:9–11 speaks of the ‘twin’ work of Christ and the Spirit, in both sanctification and justification, ‘Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’. It is clear from Romans 8:1–4 that the Spirit frees (justifies) from ‘the law of sin and death’ by that which is ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’. The work of the Cross is linked with Jesus’ offering up of himself as pure ‘through [the] eternal Spirit’, and it was the Father (Rom. 8:11) who caused this Spirit to raise him from the dead (Rom. 1:4). Because ‘we walk by

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<sup>3</sup> C. K. Barrett (Romans) has ‘publicly set forth’.

<sup>4</sup> For the theological difference between expiation and propitiation see Leon Morris’s *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*.

<sup>5</sup> The use of the verb *paradidomi* in Romans is used for God’s giving sinful Man up to sin in 1:24, 26, 28, which, in fact constitutes His wrath, and for giving His Son up to death (4:25; 8:32) which averts that wrath from sinful Man to Christ (cf. II Cor. 5:19–21; Gal. 3:13–14).

faith and not by sight’ we therefore ‘through the Spirit, by faith, wait for the hope of justification’ (Gal. 5:5). The eschatological Spirit encourages us in this hope. Again, it is the love of God by the Spirit who causes us not to be ashamed to hope in sharing the glory of God since we are ‘justified by faith’ (Rom. 5:1–6; I Cor. 6:11). Our conclusion, then, is that the objective work of justification—the work of propitiation—and the work of subjectively applying this in the justified sinner is wholly Trinitarian. We must see this work as the loving and intimate work of the Divine *perichoresis* in the works *ad extra*.

## THE TRINITARIAN WORK OF SANCTIFICATION

Let us look at the commencement of this study and see the quotes by Forsyth and Luther, keeping in mind the pericope of Isaiah 6:1–7. The Reformers and Puritans were ever on the alert that justification and sanctification should not become confused, coalesced, or layered<sup>6</sup> and yet that they should never be seen apart from each other. True holiness of life<sup>7</sup> must be seen as indispensable for salvation. When Jesus said, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God,’ he was surely implying the obverse also. Hebrews 12:14 exhorts, ‘Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord’. Revelation 21:27 says of the ultimate Holy City that ‘nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood’, and 22:11–12 speaks of the intractable will of evil doers, ‘Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy be filthy . . . Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay ever one for what he has done’. Psalm 24:3–6 asks who it is that receives the blessing from the Lord. It is the one who has ‘clean hands and a pure heart’.

### The Father and Sanctification

God’s intention for our holiness we have seen in Ephesians 1:3; I Peter 1:2; I John 3:1–3; and II Thessalonians 2:12 (cf. Col. 1:22; I Thess. 4:1–8). Paul states, ‘This is the will of God [the Father], your sanctification’. Peter links practical holiness with the Father (I Pet. 1:13–17). ‘Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile’.

To ‘invoke him as Father’ is to say the Lord’s Prayer with faith and to live it out in the presence of the Holy Father, for one day we will see Him face to face (Rev. 22:4). The transference—so to speak—of Exodus 19:5–6 to I Peter 2:9–11 is the work of the Father. He will have holy children, so that (i) the purification of the Cross (Heb. 9:14; 10:19–22; I Cor. 6:11), (ii) the justification which is the very foundation and substance of sanctification (Rom. 5:12—6:23; cf. Col. 3:1–11), and (iii) the breaking

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<sup>6</sup> Sanctification is not built *on* justification but is one with it in that both are by grace (Titus 2:11–14; I Pet. 2:9–10; I Cor. 6:11) and faith (cf. Acts 26:16–18; 15:8; 20:32).

<sup>7</sup> The terms ‘holiness’, ‘sanctification’ and ‘consecration’ call for close study. For a fuller treatment see my *The Splendour of Holiness* (NCPI, 1985).

of the power of all forms of evil, liberates the children to a holy life. The Father's heart of love must be understood in all this.

### **The Son as Sanctifier**

Christ's people are his Bride, and he 'loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish'. This he did as the Lamb by 'the precious blood', himself being 'without blemish or spot' (I Pet. 1:19; cf. Heb. 9:14). In the one act of the Cross he 'washed', 'sanctified' and 'justified' (I Cor. 6:11). The mystery of the utter purification of the believer through the Atonement can never be fully explicated, but passages such as Romans 6 and Colossians 3 require us to see that when sin's power is broken by the removal of guilt, then the presence of the power of Christ (I Cor. 6:11) leads not only to the people of God being holy by covenant inclusion—that is consecration—(cf. I Cor. 6:11; I Pet. 2:9–10), but also in the step by step practical holiness of living. This requires them to sanctify Christ in their hearts as Lord (I Pet. 3:15), and the presentation of their bodies to him as instruments of righteousness 'unto holiness' (Rom. 6:15–23)

The walk of love and the walk of holiness (cf. Gal. 5:18–26) are shown in the contrast of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, but the paradigm and source for such is Christ, so that we are to 'walk [together] in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Eph. 5:2), for it was the holiness of his bride which he had in view as the *telos* of salvation history. He coveted having her 'clothed with fine linen bright and pure' for 'the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints'.

### **The Spirit the Sanctifier<sup>8</sup>**

This has always been the mind of the church, 'The Holy Spirit who sanctifies me'. Peter has beautifully shown the Trinitarian work of God's salvation in 'chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood' (I Pet. 1:2). Likewise in II Thessalonians 2:13–14, 'But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ', whilst I Corinthians 6:11 spells out Christ and the Spirit working together for that same end, 'And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God'.

All of this had been prophetically promised in the great passages of Isaiah 4:1–6, Ezekiel chapters 36 and 37, and Joel 2:28ff. The heart of stone was to be replaced with a heart of flesh, all filthiness was to be rinsed away, and a new law and a new obedience established within the new awe and holiness of the transformed people of God. Ultimately the Holy Bride and the Holy Spirit were to be shown as one for the hour of the Bridegroom's coming. Together they would repeat the age-long prayer of the church, 'Maranatha! Lord, come!' The longing of the Bride for the Bridegroom is

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<sup>8</sup> See my *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, 1985) pp. 184–192 for a fuller treatment of the Holy Spirit and holiness.

because the Spirit of Christ, of the Son and of holiness, takes the church to her ultimate and proud place in history as the Spouse of the Son, granted to him by the Father. The eternal *Song of Songs* is then to be played out in history beyond the dreams of redeemed humanity.

## **CONCLUSION: JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION ARE TRINITARIAN**

We simply repeat the paragraph which introduced our study, for it covers all we have said: 'God the Triune God, will have His creation free from guilt, pollution and shame. The Three Persons who are in themselves 'other person centred' will look out to their creation and liberate the elect from the powers of darkness, the turmoil and the oppression, reconciling all things by the blood of the Cross. God loves the world, and His Son is the propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. A new heaven and a new earth will guarantee the new holy people, the Kingdom of Priests unto their God. To this end the Father, Son and Spirit do their work of justification and sanctification'.