

## Does New Creature Status Guarantee Experiential Sanctification?

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The connection between justification salvation and experiential sanctification cannot be denied. No one can be experientially sanctified apart from first being legally justified before God by faith in Christ. However, the fact of justification does not imply the certainty of experiential sanctification, which is a central tenet of the Reformed view of sanctification.<sup>1</sup> It will be seen that the Reformed model does not adequately handle the details of Scripture, resulting in inconsistencies and vague explanations regarding experiential sanctification. These problems can be solved by abandoning philosophical presuppositions in favor of exegetical analysis of the Scripture. The incorrect connection of inevitable experiential sanctification to the new creature status (justification) demonstrates the Reformed model's failure to consistently explain the relationship between these two spiritual realities.

Originally, Reformed Theology was formulated to combat the soteriological heresies in Roman Catholicism. In turn, this early Reformed Theology was attacked by Roman Catholicism for its lack of believer accountability. If a person is saved by grace through faith, the Romanists asked, what is his motivation to live a moral life? John Calvin's famous response, "It is, therefore, faith that justifies, yet the faith that justifies is not alone"<sup>2</sup> has had far-reaching, adverse ramifications for the doctrine of sanctification. He and later reformers fused the positional sanctification that occurs at justification with post-salvation experiential<sup>3</sup> sanctification. Like their Roman Catholic opponents, they so closely connected the two that at the instant of regeneration, the believer is not only immediately sanctified positionally but is guaranteed to be sanctified experientially. "The reformers were attempting to be consistent with their doctrine that an individual is saved by grace through faith alone, and yet, also hold that works must be a natural, inevitable, and often immediate outworking in a saved person's experience."<sup>4</sup> They believed—and their many modern followers still do assert—that "the Bible does not provide any place for a person to be saved and have no change in their life. It can't."<sup>5</sup> Though Calvin's words may be "cute,"<sup>6</sup> God in Scripture refutes both it and his enduring Reformed Theology. "The problem here is that the theology inherent in the cliché simply does not work, no matter the claims of the Reformers that it is a full and final answer to the Roman Catholic objections."<sup>7</sup>

Although the reformers were sincere in their defense of their sanctification position, their theological rebuttals to the criticisms of Roman Catholicism produced unforeseen and dire consequences, including an unbiblical uniting of positional and experiential sanctification into an inseparable unit. They declared that those who are positionally sanctified in Christ also, due to their regeneration, automatically possess a new mindset and new desire to live for God. They based this new devotion to God on the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the term "sanctification" will be used for experiential sanctification. Other meanings will be clarified with the use of the appropriate adjective, e.g. positional or ultimate.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin as quoted by Fred Lybrand, *Back to Faith, Reclaiming Gospel Clarity in an Age of Incongruence* (Longwood, Florida: Xulon Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Reformers prefer to call this process progressive sanctification, reason enough for other theologians to use the term experiential sanctification exclusively.

<sup>4</sup> Lybrand, 5.

<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, *Lectures on the Believer's Triumph Over Sin*, "The Believer's Relationship to Sin" (Panorama City, California: Word of Grace Communications, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> George Meisinger, "Salvation by Faith Alone" in Mal Couch, ed., *The Fundamentals of the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2000), 280.

<sup>7</sup> Lybrand, 58-59.

resurrection, saying that it is a “fundamental contradiction for the believer to be living in sin for which he had died.”<sup>8</sup> “Because of the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection and by his word and spirit dwelling in them, the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed.”<sup>9</sup> Although not automatic or complete in this life, the “true” believer will inevitably be sanctified because he will inevitably and successfully overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

### Sanctification’s Connection to Justification

Many theologians, including reformed, define justification as the judicial act of God whereby the believer is declared righteous upon the imputation of Christ’s righteousness at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone. This declaration is an accomplished fact and not a process.<sup>10</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer explains, “The child of God is justified by virtue of the fact that God has *declared* him to be righteous.”<sup>11</sup> Henry Thiessen states that “justification is a declarative act. It is not something wrought in man, but something declared of man. It does not make upright or righteous, but declares righteous.”<sup>12</sup> Charles Ryrie declares, “To justify means to declare righteous. Both the Hebrew (*sadaq*) and the Greek (*dikaioo*) words mean to announce or pronounce a favorable verdict, to declare righteous. The concept does not mean to make righteous, but to announce righteousness. It is a courtroom concept, so that to justify is to give a verdict of righteous.”<sup>13</sup> John Fesko agreed, writing that “the believer’s justification by faith alone secures her indefectible standing in the presence of God. In justification, the guilt and power of sin is broken and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer by faith alone in the judicial declaration pronounced by God.”<sup>14</sup> We would agree. Christ did away with the legal guilt and penalty of sin once for all on the Cross; therefore, at salvation, the believer comes out from under the power of sin.

Both the Bible and Reformed Theology similarly define positional sanctification as a once for all event that occurs at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone and includes forensic justification before God. John Calvin himself wrote that “the term sanctification denotes separation. This takes place in us when we are regenerated by the Spirit to newness of life that we may serve God and not the world.”<sup>15</sup>

Though reformed theologians hold to the same basic definitions of justification and sanctification as many non-reformed theologians, the problem lies in the details. “Reformed theologians commonly assert that sanctification continues throughout a believer’s life, in distinction from justification, which is a definitive act of God, occurring once for all.”<sup>16</sup> The following quotations from reformed theologians show that the inevitability of experiential

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *Lectures on the Believer’s Triumph Over Sin: “The Believer’s Relationship to Sin.”* Panorama City, California: Word of Grace Communications, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> William Combs, “The disjunction between justification and sanctification in contemporary evangelical theology,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* (Fall, 2001): 18, quoting from the London Baptist Confession of 1855.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Snider, “Sanctification and Justification, the Relationship.” Lecture at Masters Theological Seminary, *Faculty Lecture Series: Biblical Sanctification*. Online lecture from The Master’s Seminary website. [www.tms.edu/FacultyI.aspx?FID=20](http://www.tms.edu/FacultyI.aspx?FID=20).

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1993) 276.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Thiessen rev. by Vernon D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 2003) 275.

<sup>13</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A popular systematic guide to understanding biblical truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999) 343.

<sup>14</sup> J. V. Fesko, “Sanctification and union with Christ: a reformed perspective,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 80.3 (2010): 200.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Corinthians*, Volume 1.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Reformed View of Sanctification,” in Melvin Dieter, et al., *Five Views on Sanctification, The Reformed View* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 72.

sanctification from the moment of justification was and continues to be a foundational principle of Reformed Theology, one on which they base many of their misinterpretations of Scripture.

- “We must not, like the Romanist, confuse sanctification with justification. They are distinguishable in theory, but inseparable in practice.”<sup>17</sup>
- “In his [reformed theologian BB Warfield’s (1851-1921)] view, justification and sanctification were joined in such a way that to experience one necessarily involved experiencing the other.”<sup>18</sup>
- “Union with Christ, with the transformative grounded on the legal, is the source of the believer’s growth in holiness and righteousness.”<sup>19</sup>
- “That justification is foundational for sanctification, however, in no way suggests that we can separate the two from one another, that a person can be justified, but not sanctified, or vice versa.”<sup>20</sup>
- “Justification and Sanctification are inseparable theological realities.”<sup>21</sup>

Predictably, because of Reformed Theology’s refusal to anchor every part of their theology on every part of God’s Word<sup>22</sup>, they often contradict each other and even themselves in the details of their faith. Connecting justification and sanctification by treating them as an inseparable unit produces various Scriptural problems as well as theological contradictions even for diehard reformed theologians. For example, reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) admitted that the believer, although united in Christ, has yet to die to the sin nature,<sup>23</sup> a strange concept since Reformed Theology emphasizes the directional change suggested by the union of justification and sanctification. This confusion is apparent in the writings of Arthur Pink (1886-1952), who declared that sanctification is an event occurring simultaneously with justification and should not be separated by a long interval of time.<sup>24</sup> However, he also claimed not only that the bestowal of forgiveness at justification involves the impartation of a pure heart but also that sanctification does not involve the eradication of the carnal nature.<sup>25</sup> Reformed Sanctificationist William Combs declares that sanctification is inevitable but not automatic, requiring constant “strenuous participation” in battling the world to assist in the process.<sup>26</sup> This idea contradicts his own assertion that sanctification brings with it a complete change in direction and disposition toward God and holiness.<sup>27</sup> Most of these contradictions—and there are many—result from failing to adequately deal with the details of sanctification, instead choosing the safe path of speaking in generalities.

In Question 77, the Westminster Larger Catechism, written in the 1640’s by English and Scottish clerics, tried to clarify and legitimize their reformed view of the relationship between justification and sanctification.

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<sup>17</sup> R. B. Larter, “The Doctrine of Sanctification,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 152.

<sup>18</sup> Randall Gleason, “B.B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 1997: 241-258): 250.

<sup>19</sup> Fesko, 202.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>21</sup> MacArthur lecture.

<sup>22</sup> Reformed theologians selectively choose the parts of Scripture that support their view and consciously or unconsciously ignore those verses that contradict their faith system.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 2001) 504.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification: Discerning Real and False Notions of Holiness* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, rep. 2006) 72.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>26</sup> Combs, 44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

“Wherein do justification and sanctification differ? Answer: Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputes the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification his Spirit infuses grace, and enables to the exercise thereof; in the former, sin is pardoned; in the other, it is subdued: the one does equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.”<sup>28</sup>

Reformed theologians accuse non-reformed theologians of creating too great a distinction between justification and sanctification. We believe with gratitude to God that everyone who believes in Christ as Savior is instantly justified and can never lose his justified relationship with God because God guaranteed eternal life when He gave the believer the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Thus, positional sanctification and justification *are* inseparable. However, we know through both the study of God's Word and our obedience to His command to examine ourselves in the mirror of that Word that we remain sinners after salvation. Inevitably, then, experiential sanctification occurs in us only if we choose to follow God's commands for attaining it. In the same way, the level of our attainment of experiential sanctification depends on the level of our knowledge of and obedience to His Word.

We accuse reformed theologians of positing too close a union between justification and sanctification in believing

“we must clearly distinguish conversion from justification and realize that initial conversion is a passive reception of God's gracious acceptance of us in Christ, while the lifelong conversion process is an active pursuit of holiness and righteousness, the very thing the gospel promises that we already possess fully and completely in Christ.”<sup>29</sup>

Because they believe experiential sanctification is an inevitable outcome of justification, thereby denying the doctrine of peripatoly, they become diligent inspectors of the fruit of both themselves and others but oddly blind to their own sins and those of the people they consider to be elect. Is this one reason “Christian psychologists” and counselors are so ready to join their worldly colleagues in declaring sinful behavior not sinful at all but the result of environment, genetics, poor self-esteem, addictions, Attention Deficit Disorder, clinical depression, mental illness, anxiety disorders, and on and on? Such mental gymnastics are an inevitable outcome of a theology based on the sand of man's fallible ideas rather than on the rock of the absolute, unchanging, entire Truth of God's Word.

### **The Reformed Doctrine of Experiential Sanctification**

Nowhere are the contradictions of Reformed Theology more evident than in the details of experiential sanctification; however, reformed theologians tend to agree on three broad foundational principles. First, regeneration provides the believer with a desire for God that the process of experiential sanctification strengthens throughout the believer's life but does not take to perfection. “This is not the perfection of our life but it is the direction of our life.”<sup>30</sup> Second,

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<sup>28</sup> *The Westminster Larger Catechism : With Scripture Proofs* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Michael Horton, ed., *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992) 115.

<sup>30</sup> MacArthur lecture.

experiential sanctification is both inevitable and a process. And finally, experiential sanctification brings with it the mortification of sin in the believer.

First, Reformed Theology states that positional sanctification in its regenerative act enables the believer to live a life of holiness because of the change of intellect, will, and emotions that occurs.<sup>31</sup> With this heightened awareness of the things of God comes the desire to live a holy lifestyle. Thus, “Sanctification is the ongoing process that removes the pollution of sin and gradually conforms the sinner to the image of Christ.”<sup>32</sup> “Therefore, it is important to recognize that when one has received this new life, there will be a certain spontaneous willingness to live in conformity to the requirements of this new life, primarily because Christ, Himself, is this life and now is the controlling factor in our own bodies.”<sup>33</sup> The implication is that since the believer has a new life that is in Christ and since Christ doesn’t sin, the true believer won’t sin either. They take this position to such an extreme that most believe that “the regenerate life is incompatible with sin, and gives the believer a hatred for sin in every shape, and an unceasing desire to resist it.”<sup>34</sup> An *unceasing* desire to resist sin?

The Bible and Reformed Theology agree that the goal of experiential sanctification is the development of the character of Christ in the believer, a process by which God takes the believer and conforms him to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29). However, according to the reformed position, within the experiential sanctification process comes the promise that the believer will be continually strengthened in his walk with God. “Sanctification is not automatic in the life of the believer, but it is inevitable since ‘although the remaining corruption for a time may greatly prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes.’”<sup>35</sup> Inevitable but not automatic? Again, Reformed Theology gives vague terms, not details, to explain opinions radically at odds with the teaching of the entire counsel of God.

Though in their minds positional sanctification inevitably brings a desire to please God, they also believe that it requires the believer’s cooperation with God. “Sanctification becomes a work in which the believer cooperates by faith.”<sup>36</sup> Oddly, in their salvation doctrine, reformed theologians decry any hint of cooperation between man and God even to the point of believing that faith can’t come from man but must be received as a gift from God. In other words, man can’t believe unto salvation unless God chooses him to be one of the elect and gives him the necessary faith; however, in experiential sanctification, they believe that the believer must cooperate with God in an inevitable process. In fact, reformed theologians believe that any supposed believer who doesn’t live the progressive life of faith wasn’t ever really saved at all because living a visibly good life is inevitable for the elect, the “true” believer. Reformed theologian J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) explained that though justification, regeneration, and sanctification are present in every child of God, if one of these processes is missing, that person will not be found in Heaven.<sup>37</sup> Popular modern reformed sanctificationist John MacArthur went even farther, stating that “if the pattern of your life is not toward godliness and obedience, you

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<sup>31</sup> Thiessen, 279.

<sup>32</sup> Fesko, 200.

<sup>33</sup> Theodore H. Epp, *The Christian—His Sin and His Judgment* (Lincoln, Nebraska: The Good News Broadcasting Association, 1943) 6.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Jamieson, et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments (On spine: Critical and Explanatory Commentary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 1 Jn 3:9.

<sup>35</sup> Combs, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Marcel, “The relation between justification and sanctification in Calvin’s thought,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 1954.

<sup>37</sup> John C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, fifth impression, 1989) 15.

are not a believer.”<sup>38</sup> He further asserted that “there is no such thing as dying in Christ to walk in old life. You show me someone whose life hasn’t changed and I will show you someone who is not a Christian.”<sup>39</sup> In response, I quote the cogent words of modern theologian Ron Merryman. “I would suggest that theologians would do a much better job were they to read their Bibles more diligently in the original languages and at some point get involved in the pastorate. They would soon discover that true believers do sin. And despite their sin, they definitely do not lose their salvation.”<sup>40</sup>

Most reformed theologians agree that sanctification is a process. Abraham Kuyper wrote, “The Scriptural doctrine that sanctification is a gradual process perfected only in death must be maintained clearly and soberly.”<sup>41</sup> However, does justification guarantee this gradual sanctifying process, or can a justified believer fail to reach maximum experiential sanctification? Reformed theologians declare that “sanctification for the believer is inevitable.”<sup>42</sup> Note the word *inevitable*. If God elected you to believe in Jesus Christ and you have believed, you absolutely will be sanctified experientially.

The Bible and Reformed Theology both teach that because a sinner is accepted by God through justification at salvation, he is expected to live a certain way and that godly lifestyle is the cooperation of the believer with God in the process of experiential sanctification. The problem lies in the inevitability of the process. MacArthur declared that “when you are transformed by being immersed into Jesus Christ and His life becomes your life, and your life becomes His life and you become a partaker of the divine nature as 2 Peter 1:4 calls it, when that takes place your new life is a new daily life pattern.”<sup>43</sup> So at salvation, the believer immediately abandons his previous sinful thoughts and actions and begins a “daily life pattern” of godliness? Reformed theologians argue that this unbreakable walk with God has to be ensured by God because if the believer had the ability to choose to sin or not sin, the distinction between man and his Creator would be destroyed and the sovereignty of God would be denied; therefore, living a godly life of no sin is not a volitional choice but an inevitable out-flowing of positional sanctification.

But does positional sanctification *guarantee* that the process of experiential sanctification is inevitable and inevitably successful? Reformed theologians answer yes.

- In the words of John Calvin, “Man is not justified by faith alone, that is, by a bare and empty knowledge of God; he is justified by works, that is, his righteousness is known and proved by its fruits.”<sup>44</sup>
- “The doctrine of definitive sanctification<sup>45</sup> helps us to see that those who are in Christ have made a decisive and irreversible break with sin.”<sup>46</sup>
- “While we are called to be ‘filled with the Spirit’ (Eph. 5:18), that is merely a figure of speech: ‘Do not get drunk on wine...Instead be filled with the Spirit.’ In other words,

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<sup>38</sup> MacArthur lecture.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ron Merryman, *The Passion War: Spiritual Conflict in Every Believer* (Casa Grand, Arizona: Merryman Ministries, 2002) 4.

<sup>41</sup> Kuyper, 493.

<sup>42</sup> Combs, 44.

<sup>43</sup> MacArthur lecture.

<sup>44</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of James* (2:20) 38.

<sup>45</sup> Definitive sanctification is a term developed by theologian John Murray (1898-1975 AD), who noticed that many passages in Scripture spoke of sanctification as a completed event instead of an ongoing process. (This author considers those passages to speak of positional sanctification, not experiential sanctification.)

<sup>46</sup> Hoekema, 74.

make sure you're under the right influence! Every believer is Spirit-filled and, therefore, a recipient of every heavenly blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3-4)."<sup>47</sup>

- “Everywhere in Scripture provide both the declaration of who we are in Christ (indicative) and the command to respond to that particular declaration in a certain way (imperative)... These are not plateaus for victorious Christians who have surrendered all and willed their way to victory, but realities for every believer, regardless of how small one's faith or how weak one's repentance.”<sup>48</sup>
- “The Reformed view understands that faith is proved by works. More importantly, many in this tradition hold that without works the faith that is claimed to be saving (from hell to heaven) is simply spurious, intellectual, and not of the kind that genuinely saves.”<sup>49</sup>
- “Faith without deeds (or works) is like a corpse, a body without the spirit or breath. Such a thing is dead, useless, fit only to be buried. Such a faith will not save a person. True saving faith is that which results in works or deeds of obedience to God.”<sup>50</sup>
- Commenting on Matthew 13:18-23: “The parable provides a sober reminder that even the most enthusiastic outward response to the gospel offers no guarantee that one is a true disciple. Only the tests of time, perseverance under difficult circumstances, the avoidance of the idolatries of wealth and anxiety over earthly concerns (recall 6:25–34), and above all the presence of appropriate fruit (consistent obedience to God's will) can prove a profession genuine.”<sup>51</sup>
- “Titus 1:16 expresses the major theme of Titus: ‘A believer's character and conduct must be consistent with his confession.’ This is the basic message of the epistle of James: faith without works is a fallacy.”<sup>52</sup>

Because we examine our souls through the mirror of God's Word, we are left scratching our heads. We know only too personally that man continues sinning after salvation. How do reformed theologians explain away this obvious truth? Arrogant denial of their own sinful natures, of course, but how do they theologically justify such sleight of hand? They have developed the doctrine of the mortification of sin, which avers that while sin isn't dead in the believer in his justified position, his victory over the dominion of sin is ensured. “Sin is ever active, but no longer reigns. The *normal* direction of the believer's energies is against sin; the law of God after the inward man is the *ruling* principle of his true self though the old nature, not yet *fully* deadened, rebels and sins. Contrast 1Jn 5:18 with Jn 8:34; compare Ps 18:22, 23. The magnetic needle, the nature of which is always to point to the pole, is easily turned aside, but always reseeks the pole.”<sup>53</sup>

Many in the reformed position build their understanding of the weakening or mortification of sin on the works of John Owen (1616-1683). According to Owen, the mortification of sin in the believer involves a habitual weakening of the lust through the constant

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<sup>47</sup> Horton, 113.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>49</sup> Lybrand, 70. (referencing Ralph Martin from *Word Biblical Commentary: James*, vol. 48)

<sup>50</sup> D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition* (Rev. ed. of: *The New Bible Commentary*. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970.;, 4th ed.) (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Jas 2:26.

<sup>51</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, (electronic ed.; Logos Library System; The New American Commentary. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992)) 218.

<sup>52</sup> Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* (Rev. ed. of: *New Bible Companion*. 1990.) The Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001) 653.

<sup>53</sup> Jamieson, 1 Jn 3:9.

fight against sin that produces a degree of success in the battle.<sup>54</sup> The “new creature” in Christ has a transformed thinking and behavior that constantly seek the things of God. Through this transformation of character, sin in the believer is mortified although never completely in this life. The Reformed position avoids the concept of perfect sanctification of the believer while on earth seemingly to prevent being linked with second blessing theology or perfectionism. They imply the perfection of a right attitude in the believer even as they say perfection cannot be achieved in this life, another contradiction that causes them to employ generalities rather than specifics to present this biblically untenable view.

Reformed Theology believes that if God changes a person constitutionally at the moment of regeneration, then, in that process, the constitutional defect of sin is lessened or even removed. Reformed theologian Murray neatly summarized this theology: “As we can not allow for any reversal or repetition of the resurrection [of Christ], so we can not allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer is a new man, that the old man has been crucified, that the body of sin has been destroyed, and that, as a new man in Christ Jesus, he serves God in the newness that is none other than that of the Holy Spirit of whom he has become a habitation and his body the temple.”<sup>55</sup>

Careful Scriptural analysis indicates that the “new nature” does not improve the sin nature and definitely does not mortify it. Instead, the new nature gained through faith alone in Christ alone wars with the old nature, which continues its same sinful habits and trends. A believer’s long-held sinful habits and trends change only through ever-increasing understanding of God’s Word under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Man is the one who must choose to have his thinking transformed, but God is the One who does the transforming. This spiritual battle between God the Holy Spirit and His Truth and the sin nature and its pagan thinking rages in the believer 24/7. Only moment by moment trust in the power of God the Holy Spirit and His Word can bring victory over the insistent temptations of the sin nature. All believers fail in the battle at times, some even for their entire spiritual lives, but all remain saved because Christ did the work of salvation, and His work is perfect and eternal. Once we believe, we can’t undo His perfect work. We can’t exchange the spirit God gave us at salvation for our preferred model. We can change our thinking back to unbelief in our salvation, but our changed thinking in no way destroys the perfect salvation work of Christ. We remain secure in our eternal salvation, a security that Reformed Theology precludes.

While Reformed Theology believes that the act of positional sanctification makes sin a defeated enemy and the believer incapable of returning to its slavery, the Bible clearly states that a new believer has the immediate opportunity to be experientially sanctified, but an opportunity only. Certainly, he can choose to serve God as His slave as reformed theologians claim, but, equally, he can choose to return to slavery to sin (2 Peter 2:20-22). The epic event of David and Goliath provides an illustration of both the reformed and biblical positions and is used by reformed theologians to prove their theology.<sup>56</sup> Goliath was the embodiment of nasty, stinky, totally repulsive sin. Outwardly, his grotesquely huge body was disfigured with the deforming scars and bruises of previous battles and the ravages of his degenerate lifestyle. His flesh was crusted with the black filth that comes from hatred of water, symbolic in the Bible of God and His Word. Inwardly, he reeked of arrogance, reveling in his strength, stature, and brutality. In contrast, sweet, kind, courageous David represented the humble believer who glorifies God in his thoughts, words, and deeds. He bravely battled big, bad sin, declaring that the battle is the Lord’s (1 Samuel 17:47). The reformed position extols their man David, who inevitably defeated the

<sup>54</sup> John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004) 32-39.

<sup>55</sup> John Murray, *The Collective Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust: 1977) 2:293.

<sup>56</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 85.



abomination of sin completely. Yes, sin was really, truly, very seriously dead! David was holding Goliath's head in his hand! How much deader could sin be!

Inconveniently for their argument, the Bible clearly presents the choices David had to make. He could have chosen to remain with his brothers, cowering in the hills far from Goliath. Many Israelite believers made that choice. Or he could have said, "The battle is mine" as he strutted out in Saul's imposing armor. David defeated Goliath because he chose to fight for the honor of his God against the pagan giant who mocked Him. He was successful because he chose to trust the God he loved. He was not a robot with no choice but to do right. He chose the right action because the Lord he served was more real to him than the powerful giant who roared his blasphemies against Israel and, therefore, against God. Rather than illustrating Reformed Theology's biblically unsound position of the inevitability of serving God piously, the battle between David and Goliath comforts and strengthens the believer as he, too, faces battles in which he must choose to stand firm for God or retreat behind the convenient justifications of the world. The giant is big, really big and powerful, really powerful; therefore, you have the right to be afraid. Again, Reformed Theology ignores the historical, literal hermeneutic, which allows Scripture to speak for itself. They choose, instead, to mangle Scripture and its context so they can claim that the Bible supports their biblically unsupportable theological claims.

## 2 Corinthians 5:17, The New Creature

Justification by means of faith in Christ as Savior produces many changes for the believer. Redemption, regeneration, possession of eternal life, and baptism into Christ are just a few. According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the believer's new position in Christ, which results from the immediate baptism by means of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), makes him into a "new creature." But does this new creature status guarantee experiential sanctification as reformed theologians declare? Many within Christendom—we might even say most—give a resounding yes to this question because they believe the reformed position. Since a believer is justified before God, he will automatically undergo the process of sanctification salvation in time. According to Kuyper, the work of God at salvation perfectly sanctifies the believer but the degree of sanctification development depends on spiritual growth. But—and this is a big but!—the new man will automatically grow in regards to the spirit, obey God's commands, and thus be positionally sanctified.<sup>57</sup>

Some claim that the Spirit performs such a work at salvation when the heart of the believer is brought "into complete conformity with the Divine Law."<sup>58</sup> B. B. Warfield believed that "God delivers us from our sinful nature, not indeed by 'abruptly' but by progressively eradicating it, and meanwhile controlling it. For the new nature which God gives us is not an absolutely new somewhat, alien to our personality, inserted into us, but our old nature itself remade – a veritable recreation, or making of all things new."<sup>59</sup> Such an understanding comes from belief in a soteriological position not presented in the text of Scripture.

"Twenty-five years ago, anyone in Bible believing circles that taught the eradication of the sin nature was a rarity and shunned by good Bible scholars and teachers. That every believer had a sin nature (or "an old nature") and a divine nature (or a "new nature") was common Bible doctrine. But today, some very popular and well-known Bible teachers are promoting the idea that a regenerated believer has only one nature. Though stopping short of eradication, one-

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<sup>57</sup> Kuyper, 493-494.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur Pink, *Free Grace Broadcaster*, Issue 214, 35.

<sup>59</sup> Horton, 215.

naturism is currently taught by such well-known figures as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John MacArthur, Jr., Neil Anderson, Charles Solomon, and Kay Arthur.”<sup>60</sup>

Nowhere in Scripture did the apostle Paul teach a guaranteed sanctification for those who have been justified through faith alone in Christ alone. Consider his letter to the Corinthians, the most biographical of his epistles. In it, he used the imperative mood to make a number of appeals to the Corinthians to live in godly ways. These imperative commands imply the need for a response. The believer must decide if he will comply with each command or not. The fact that God gives man the ability to make such a decision, even one of disobedience, does not imply a loss of the Creator’s sovereign rulership as Reformed Theology declares. Instead, God wants the believer to *choose* to live his life in service to Him, not worship Him because he has no choice.

In Galatians 6:15 in the context of positional truth, Paul used the same “new creation” terminology of 2 Corinthians 5:17 to describe the believer’s new status in Christ. “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” “Every believer has his standing ‘in Christ Jesus.’ In himself he has only condemnation; but in Christ he has found divine acceptance.”<sup>61</sup> This new standing is one of the “new things” that comes for the believer in Christ. Paul argued that a person’s racial background does not have standing before God (Romans 10:12; Colossians 3:11) but the “new creature” status provides that standing. The Greek word *KAINĒ*, meaning new, used in this passage “emphasizes the quality of the new thing in comparison to the old. In view is the regenerated man as in *II Cor. 5:17*.”<sup>62</sup> As in the 2 Corinthians 5 passage, Paul used the believer’s understanding of his new position in Christ to motivate him in the spiritual walk (Galatians 6:16). Such an exhortation to choose to walk in a specified way emphasizes the fact “that walking in the Spirit is not automatic and inevitable (Gal. 5:16).”<sup>63</sup>

J. C. Ryle made the reformed position clear when he said, “Sanctification, again, is the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration. He that is born again and made a new creature receives a new nature and a new principle and always lives a new life.”<sup>64</sup> A new creature always lives a new life? Commenting on Second Corinthians 5:17, John MacArthur said, “(T)his is the purpose of salvation: to transform an individual completely. Genuine saving faith changes a person’s behavior, it transforms his thinking, and it puts within him a new heart.”<sup>65</sup> He claims that “old things pass away. Sin and selfishness and worldly pleasure are replaced by new things. That is the whole point of salvation. It produces a changed life.”<sup>66</sup> This same perspective is found in MacArthur’s Study Bible in the study note on 2 Corinthians 5:17.<sup>67</sup> Yes, Reformed Theology is alive and thriving in much of what passes for modern Christianity. Interestingly, MacArthur and others who believe that salvation ensures experiential sanctification spend enormous amounts of time giving godliness instructions to believers who, according to their view of sanctification, should have already gained the biblical worldview at regeneration. As we continue to see, inconsistencies flourish in this false theology.

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<sup>60</sup> Merryman, *The Passion War*, 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Gromacki, *Stand Fast in Liberty: An Exposition of Galatians* (The Woodlands, Texas: Kress Christian Publications, 2002) 194.

<sup>62</sup> Ron Merryman, *Galatians: God’s Antidote to Legalism* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Merryman Ministries, 1999) 120.

<sup>63</sup> Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, North Carolina: Schoettle Publishing Co., sec. ed. 1993) 363.

<sup>64</sup> Ryle, 17.

<sup>65</sup> John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1989) 96.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>67</sup> *MacArthur Study Bible’s* comment on 2 Cor. 5:17: “After a person is regenerate, old value systems, priorities, beliefs, loves, and plans are gone. Evil and sin are still present, but the believer sees them in a new perspective, and they no longer control him.”

### A Contextual Flyover of 2 Corinthians 5

Because Reformed Theology uses 2 Corinthians 5:17 as prime proof of their “inevitable sanctification” position, an understanding of its meaning as ascertained from the correct literal hermeneutic is essential. Its context in chapter 5 and in the entire epistle helps us determine God’s meaning as expressed through his servant Paul in his divinely inspired writings. This verse comes in the middle of Paul’s discussion of positional Truth. Paul knew that living the spiritual life is a continual struggle (Galatians 5:17), that a war between two opposing forces, the sin nature or flesh and God the Holy Spirit, rages within every believer in Christ every moment of every day.<sup>68</sup> He also recognized the reality and brutality of this spiritual battle. The Corinthians, who were prone to heed the siren song of the flesh, needed proper motivation to fight the spiritual war successfully.<sup>69</sup> God included this teaching in the Bible because we need that motivation, too.

Scripture presents three main types of motivation. One, modeling motivation, involves looking to others who have successfully lived the spiritual life and following their examples of faith. Hebrews 11 provides many wonderful examples of believers who succeeded in this spiritual warfare either in their general lifestyle or at one crucial point in their lives. The next, reward and punishment motivation, supplies incentives for the believer to do right—or not do wrong—even when under extreme pressure (Revelation 2 and 3). The third motivation, the believer gaining an understanding of his position in Christ and the responsibilities that go with it, is the primary motivating factor for obedience to God’s commands. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul linked positional truth (5:17) with rewards (5:10) as motivating factors in living for Christ. His exhortation implies that the believer can choose to live for self instead of for Christ. If a believer can choose to refuse to obey God, the “new creature” status does not and cannot guarantee experiential sanctification. But it does make it possible.

Being a new creature does not mean that the believer has lost every vestige of his sin nature, that his sin nature has decreased in strength, or that pre-salvation sinful habits have been eradicated. Being a new creature in Christ means that the new nature, which has the power through God the Holy Spirit and His Word to resist temptations to sin, wars against the old, totally sinful nature. To live for God, the believer must *choose* to say no to the thinking and temptations of the old sinful nature. The context of 2 Corinthians gives the motivation for using the new creature status to obey God in His Word rather than his sin nature as he formerly did in his unbelief. Why would Paul emphasize our need for motivation to live the spiritual life if obeying God is an inevitable result of justification? He wouldn’t. Reformed theologians take verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 5 out of its motivation context for one reason, to justify their false position about the inevitability of experiential sanctification. They choose to ignore Paul’s well developed theological point that our understanding of our position in Christ is a prime motivator to live the spiritual life as God commands. Being a new creature means the believer should choose to live the spiritual life, be an ambassador, give cheerfully, love everyone with unconditional love, and on and on. Every imperative command in Paul’s writings implies that we must make moment by moment choices to obey God. If new creation status guaranteed experiential sanctification, we wouldn’t need commands. We’d know how to glorify God without biblical instructions. In fact, we could jettison much of the Bible because much of its content spells out our responsibilities to our God.

Contextually, at the end of 2 Corinthians 4, Paul emphasized the crucial importance of day by day renovation of the believer’s thinking. Such renovation requires an eternal rather than

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<sup>68</sup> Merryman, *The Passion War*, 1.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Gromacki, *Stand Firm in the Faith: An Exposition of II Corinthians* (The Woodlands, Texas: Kress Christian Publications, 2002) 74.

earthly perspective, including joyful anticipation of the eternal body that all believers will receive at the Resurrection. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit that every believer receives at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone serves as God's guarantee, His pledge, that we will one day possess this incorruptible body. The believer's focus on eternity and his confidence in God's faithfulness to fulfill this promise provide motivation to live the spiritual life with confidence, to continue the walk by faith.

In 2 Corinthians 4:9, Paul declared that as long as he was in his present body, he not only wanted to serve God but also to develop a character pleasing to Him. This pleasing character refers to the purpose for renewal ("the eternal weight of glory") set forth in 2 Corinthians 4:16. His motivation for gaining this pleasing character was the promise of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ when his Savior will evaluate that character and the deeds it produced. "This passage corresponds with the passage in 1 Cor. 3 concerning the future judgment of the believer's works and insists that doing good is not guaranteed; otherwise, why would someone be recompensed for the things done that were bad? 2 Cor. 5:9-11 shows that choice is involved in the doing good works for the already saved. If one can choose not to do works for one moment, then why can one not choose for all the moments of his life?"<sup>70</sup>

2 Corinthians 5:14 contains a subjective genitive<sup>71</sup> to indicate Christ's love for Paul. Because Paul was absolutely convinced of the reality of that love, he was further motivated to serve God in obedience. Now that he was in Christ, he was committed to live his life as his Savior demanded, not for self, but for the One who died as the substitute for his sin. He again emphasized the fact that believers make choices; they may choose to live for Christ or for the lustful desires of their flesh (Romans 7:19). Believers must make that choice every moment of every day.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Ephesians 4:17-24

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 emphasizes the believer's responsibility to live in the reality of the new life he now has in Christ. The inferential conjunction along with the perfect active indicative for *recognize* indicate the need for a new perspective. Living the spiritual life in obedience to God's commands demands a divine perspective. This new perspective allows the believer to recognize that his actions are not merely logical or emotional, as he had imagined from his pre-salvation perspective, but connected to the spiritual battle that always rages behind the scenes of life that we perceive.

A believer's legal justification before God does not imply an instant change of perspective from worldly to eternal. Each believer must have his thinking renewed through the power of God the Holy Spirit and God's Word. The believer's new creature status makes that

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<sup>70</sup> Lybrand, 156.

<sup>71</sup> The phrase "of Christ" can be a subjective genitive meaning "Christ loved Paul" or an objective genitive meaning "Paul loved Christ."

renewal possible but does not imply a guaranteed fruition. We enter into the spiritual life with the same old sinful nature and sinful habits we had the moment before we believed in Christ. “The ‘old things’ do not refer to past sinful habits; rather, they point to the reasons a sinner stands condemned before a holy God.”<sup>72</sup> He is condemned because he is spiritually dead, positioned in Adam, and under God’s wrath. As noted, the entire context of 2 Corinthians teaches that good works are not guaranteed in the life of a believer, but the potential is present because of the new position in Christ. The “new creature” status in Christ means the believer now has the opportunity to live for Christ and have the character of Christ developed in him through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

The “new creature” status relates to the believer’s newly gained position in Christ. He is no longer in his old position in Adam because a spiritual transformation from spiritual death to spiritual life occurred at the moment of regeneration. As Paul wrote in Titus 3:5, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” “When this happens, a new thing is produced, the new creation.”<sup>73</sup> This new spiritual reality provides everything necessary for day by day renewal of the believer in Christ into the character of Christ. God expects every believer to go through the renewal process; however, God doesn’t guarantee spiritual renewal since He gives every believer the freedom to choose to live for self, rather than for his Savior.

Reformed theologians disagree, believing that “(S)anctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, puts a new principle in his heart and makes him practically godly in life.”<sup>74</sup> They buttress their misinterpretation of 2 Corinthians 5 with their misinterpretation of Titus 3:5, which they also rip out of context. Arthur Pink took their misinterpretation of the verse to the extreme, writing, “By this ‘washing of regeneration,’ the soul is so cleansed from its native pollution that sin is no longer loved, but loathed; the Divine Law is no longer hated, but delighted in; and the affections are raised from things below unto things above.”<sup>75</sup> Sadly, many Christians today have remained so enthralled with the unreality of their flesh-focused world that they believe this obvious hogwash.

“Every person who believes is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. This baptism unites us with Christ so that just as He died to sin, so have we. ‘*Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.*’ (Rom. 6:6-7) The crucifixion of our “old man” or the “body of sin,” which is “done away with,” refers to the overthrow of sin’s power in us, in our bodies. Though we are saved, we carry with us the effects of our old lives under the power of sin.”<sup>76</sup> And so we will sin even as we learn God’s Word and God the Holy Spirit trains our thinking to become the thinking of Christ. But our position in Christ gives us the power—again through God’s Word and God the Holy Spirit—to say no to sin, and when we do sin, which is sadly inevitable, to confess our sins (1 John 1:9) and again come out from under the power of sin.

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<sup>72</sup> Gramacki, *Stand Firm*, 90.

<sup>73</sup> Dillow, 508.

<sup>74</sup> Ryle, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Pink, *Free Grace Broadcaster*, (Issue 214): 35.

<sup>76</sup> Charles C. Bing, *Simply by Grace* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2009) 110-111.

### **Three Stages of Salvation/Sanctification as Found in the Bible**

Since God clearly presents the sanctification position many times in Scripture, why do reformed theologians continue even today to cling so tenaciously to false thinking? A main reason is that they don't understand that the term salvation is used in three different ways throughout Scripture. First, the Bible speaks of salvation (deliverance) from the wrath of God, resulting in deliverance from the Lake of Fire. Salvation resulting in the believer's new position in Christ is a free gift as a result of trusting in Christ alone as the substitute sacrifice for all sins. This first phase of salvation is the past tense aspect in which the believer is saved from sin's penalty (John 3:16, 36). Such deliverance constitutes positional sanctification as we are identified with Christ at the moment of believing in Him for salvation through the baptism by means of the Holy Spirit. Sadly, this salvation is the only one most theologians recognize as they interpret Scripture; therefore, their conclusions are often deceiving.

The second phase or present tense of our salvation involves the process of experiential sanctification whereby we are saved from the power of sin through moment by moment decisions to be renewed in the inner man (John 10:10; 2 Peter 1:5-9). This "process salvation," which involves spiritual growth and maturity, requires obedience to God's Word, including the believer's choice to submit either to the Spirit or to the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17). The Bible speaks of working out our own salvation. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12-13) The imperative commands of the life of godliness, the spiritual life, involve "faith unto faith" (Romans 1:17), salvation faith becoming experiential faith based on knowledge of and obedience to God's Word, "as we take hold of eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12). In this second phase of salvation, "Sin interrupts the joy of experiencing Jesus' gift of eternal life, the life of God who is in us."<sup>77</sup>

The final type of salvation, which is ultimate sanctification, is the completed salvation obtained when we receive our resurrection bodies and are found to be as Christ is. This glorification salvation includes the removal of the presence of sin from our bodies at the resurrection (Romans 13:11) and Christ's subsequent evaluation of our obedience to the lifetime process of experiential sanctification.<sup>78</sup> This future tense salvation is the glorification of the believer as the prepared bride of Christ. Maranatha!

Understanding these three phases or aspects of salvation provides the key to unlocking difficult passages that at first glance appear to be speaking about the same salvation. Although it is easier and certainly less time consuming to simply link these three aspects of salvation into one act of God, God presents Himself and His plan in a way that requires us to think. We gain understanding of His plan only through an arduous and often painful process as God the Holy Spirit forces us to discard many of our cherished beliefs as we gradually realize they aren't supported by Scripture. As Peter pointed out regarding Paul (2 Peter 3:14-16), some spiritual concepts are especially difficult to understand, but that does not excuse over-simplification, and, therefore, distortion, of God's inerrant special revelation.

### **Philosophical Foundations of Reformed Theology**

Why does Reformed Theology attempt to explain away the clear teaching of Scripture through a system of theological contradictions? Because their love of their presuppositions prevents clear understanding of Scriptural Truth. "There is a great danger when once we have

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>78</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000) 6.

adhered to one particular school of thought or adopted one particular system of theology, of reading the Bible in light of that school or system and finding its distinctive features in what we read.”<sup>79</sup> Reformed Theology builds its tenets on a philosophical methodology rather than on exegetical analysis of the entire text of Scripture. These philosophical underpinnings produce a lack of continuity not only in Reformed Theology itself but also in each theologian’s understanding of it.

Reformed Theology, especially of the Calvinistic persuasion, is heavily built on the theology of Augustine (354-430 AD).<sup>80</sup> A profound theologian, Augustine followed in the teachings of his Christian predecessors, especially Justin Martyr (103-165 AD), Clement (155-215 AD), Origen (185-254 AD), and Plotinus (205-270 AD). Though these early Apologists made contributions to correct biblical thinking, they made a disastrous foundational error in their theology that continues to plague Christians today. Rather than purging from Christianity the Greek philosophical thinking admired at that time, they chose to merge the pagan worldview with God’s Word. For example, “Justin Martyr was trained in pagan platonic philosophy: after conversion, his defense of Christianity was philosophical in nature, not exegetical or biblically theological.”<sup>81</sup> They wanted their Christian beliefs to be accepted by the elite thinkers of the world, the ones whose ideas had universal approval. They sacrificed the pure meaning of God’s Word in their search to make Christianity popular in the world. Largely because of the influence of these early theologians, the Church began the insidious application of Plato’s philosophy to Christianity, a compromise that continues today.

Even before Martyr and the beginning of the Church Age, Jewish theologian Philo (20 BC-50 AD) of Alexandria, Egypt, attempted to merge Greek philosophy with Jewish thinking because he saw similarities between the two. Plato held to a non-material reality in which the unchanging universals (the ideals) existed. While the Bible agrees that unchanging reality does exist outside the created cosmos, it teaches that this spiritual reality exists in the absolute Truth and holiness of Creator/God. Unlike Plato, the Bible does not teach that the physical world is any less a reality than the spiritual. Plato viewed physical reality as flawed and sought an escape from the material world. Though biblically literate believers know that the physical reality we live in is flawed by sin, we do not seek to escape that flawed reality but instead to have the right relationship with the One who created it perfect.

Following in Philo’s flawed footsteps in trying to merge Jewish thinking with philosophy, the Apologists of the early Church (150-300 AD) tried to merge Christianity with pagan Greek philosophy, which continued to be the popular worldly thought system.<sup>82</sup> Justin Martyr claimed that Greek philosophers like Socrates, though atheists, were actual partakers of the divine because they “lived reasonably.”<sup>83</sup> Does this remind you of the “many ways to God” heresy so popular today? It should because it’s all based on the same Greek philosophy used by theologians back then! Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD) said, “The same God that furnished both the Covenants was the giver of Greek philosophy to the Greeks.”<sup>84</sup> They actually believed that Greek philosophy could make meaningful contributions to biblical thought because they believed they were both equally from God! Unlike these early Christians who consciously worked to merge these contrary worldviews, Christians today seldom realize that they include pagan Greek philosophy in their theological thinking. Their excuse may be ignorance of the

<sup>79</sup> F.F. Bruce, Foreword in Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*.

<sup>80</sup> Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 2007) 37-40.

<sup>81</sup> Ron Merryman, *Justification by Faith Alone and Its Historical Challenges* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Merryman Ministries, 2000) 32.

<sup>82</sup> Greek philosophy dominates modern thinking under the guise of humanism.

<sup>83</sup> *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:178.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 2.489.

philosophical thinking that is now accepted as biblical theology, but the truth is that their sloppy, presuppositional exegesis and focus on favored passages keeps them ignorant of God's meaning as ascertained from conscientious study of the entirety of His Word under the power of God the Holy Spirit.

In the age of the Theologians (300-600 AD), Augustine continued this heresy by firmly incorporating the material versus non-material philosophical ideas of Plato into Christian doctrine. These men and their modern counterparts did not heed Paul's warning to resist being taken captive by empty philosophy (Colossians 2:8). Just because a system of thinking possesses similarities with another does not mean they have equal value or should be merged. A monkey shares similarities with a man, but the differences are crucial. Man was created in the image of God; animals were not. The monkey does not become man as evolutionists aver. Instead, their faith-based system of thinking lowers man to the nothing status of a non-image bearing animal. Similarly, merging pagan Greek philosophy with the Word of God makes the Word just another philosophical system based on man's fallible thinking, thereby destroying the identification of absolute Truth as coming from the Creator alone.

Because Reformer John Calvin so closely adhered to the flawed reasoning of Augustine, his theological system as categorized later by others contains the same mixture of philosophical logic camouflaged by biblical nomenclature. This reformed soteriological position rests on a tight framework historically known as the TULIP.<sup>85</sup> "The Calvinistic system especially emphasizes five distinct doctrines. These are technically known as 'The Five Points of Calvinism.' And they are the main pillars upon which the superstructure rests."<sup>86</sup>

The fifth part of the system, the P, relates to experiential sanctification, also known as the perseverance of the believers. "Perseverance may be defined as that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer, by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart, is continued and brought to completion."<sup>87</sup> The elect believer will persevere, inevitably producing works that demonstrate the legitimacy of his positional sanctification. If God provides faith for the elect, then that elect person must be experientially sanctified or he will not persevere, proving that he wasn't ever truly saved. In forming this argument, Reformed Theology took the Greek philosophy that denies that the spiritual can exist alongside the material and, because the idea was pleasing to them, chose Scriptures to support those ideas without first determining God's meaning for His Words.

Since the time pagans began using philosophy as their rebuttal to their sure knowledge of the existence of God and His Truth (Romans 1), philosophical meanderings have played a major role in answering theological questions. Even reformed theologian Randall Gleason admitted that Scottish common-sense philosophy heavily influenced the great theologian B.B. Warfield.<sup>88</sup> How much easier to retain the worldly thinking that was all we had before salvation than to engage in the arduous work of exegetically studying the text of Scripture. Could it be that under the pressure of the Romanist's attacks, Calvin followed the example of so many of the early Church Fathers before him and defended himself using his philosophical understanding rather than the text of Scripture?

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<sup>85</sup> "The Five Points of Calvinism, the TULIP, are taken from the Canon of Dordrecht (usually shortened to Dordt or Dort), formulated at the Synod of Dort in 1619. Although there had been other synods at Dort, this one is referred to as "the great synod" and is acknowledged by Calvinists as having both historical and religious significance." Vance, 148.

<sup>86</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 59.

<sup>87</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 546.

<sup>88</sup> Gleason, 246.



### Why Does Any of this Matter?

The Reformed theological system, which was built on a self-defeating cliché in dealing with a Catholic attack on grace, continues to inflict great damage on Christian thought today. It provides a sad illustration of the damaging effects of man failing to vigilantly guard against the philosophical world system that Paul warned us about in Colossians 2:8. The Aristotelian logic and neo-platonic philosophical thinking used by reformed theologians establishes divine sovereignty as the ultimate determiner of all choices by both God and His creatures, thereby removing man's responsibility and making him merely a pawn in a cosmic chess match. Although the Creator's choosing ability is different from His creatures', we must not conclude that the choice of the creature removes, damages, or in any way affects the sovereignty of God. Just because the Creator has given man the freedom to choose for or against Him doesn't imply destruction of His sovereignty. Instead, the granting of such freedom shows God as immeasurably greater than the reformed model allows.

The belief that the positionally sanctified believer is guaranteed experiential sanctification in time is a Scripturally unprovable theory with no practical value for anyone.<sup>89</sup> Reformed theology's distortion of justification pollutes not only experiential sanctification through a guaranteed spiritual walk but also the Gospel message itself.<sup>90</sup> No doubt we should live in the reality of our "new creature" status, but Scripture teaches that the positionally sanctified believer may choose to live in sin—and often does. "Paul clearly asserted believers could live carnally; however, he also knew it would come at a great price."<sup>91</sup> That great price is the reason we must stand firm against the Reformed Theology that has become so popular today that it threatens to swallow Bible-centered Christianity in its evil maw.

The price paid for living a sinful lifestyle as a believer is not loss of salvation or loss of the proof of salvation. Instead, the price is the forfeiture of fantastic rewards both now and for all eternity. "Some who started well in their Christian life but gave up when the going got tough will discover that they have lost the inheritance of their birthright blessings (Hebrews 12:1-7). Others will discover that they have forfeited incorruptible crowns through their unwillingness to serve the Lord or because of some brief moments of selfish indulgence."<sup>92</sup>

We must assure our fellow believers of the certainty of their salvation if they have believed in Christ as their Savior. We must encourage them in their spiritual battles by using the spiritual life motivations of Scripture. We must not fall into Reformed Theology's trap of attempting to manipulate believers' obedience through guilt or insecurity about eternal salvation. We must eradicate our presuppositions and accurately exegete and teach the whole counsel of God so that the sheep in our care can confidently live spiritual lives focused on eternity and overflowing with joy, confidence, thanksgiving, inner peace, and the humility necessary to confess sins to God the Father and accurately learn and think God's Word.

**CONCLUSION:** The Bible illuminates the Truth that faith in Christ guarantees eternity with God in Heaven but does not guarantee experiential sanctification in time.

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<sup>89</sup> Lybrand, 192.

<sup>90</sup> Merryman, *Justification*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Lybrand, 278.

<sup>92</sup> Joe Wall, *Going for the Gold* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991) 116.

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