

2, The Relationship Between Justification and Sanctification

Sanctification

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In Matthew chapter one and in verse 21 the angel said to Joseph when he was speaking to him about Mary's unexpected pregnancy, he said to Joseph that Mary was going to bring forth a son and that she was to call his name Jesus for he would save his people from their sins. And so this passage in Matthew one and verse 21, "...thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins,"¹ declares the very heart and very essence of the gospel.

What is the gospel? The gospel is a message about salvation from sin through a person and that person is Jesus Christ. And that salvation that Jesus brings is not something that is merely provisional. It is something that shall certainly secure its end and purpose. He shall save his people from their sins.

And so Jesus came to save his people from their sins. That is the central message of the gospel. And this salvation from sin is a large and complex subject. It is a subject which is described in the Bible by a whole variety of terms. And it is critical for us to understand these terms and their meaning if we are to rightly understand the salvation from sin that Jesus Christ has provided us with.

Now it is our purpose today to take two of those terms that describe the saving work of Jesus from the sins that we have committed and examine them today, compare them and contrast them with each other and in so doing better understand who Jesus saves us from our sins and what that process actually is.

Two of the words that are used in the Bible to describe salvation that Jesus achieved are the words "justification" and the words "sanctification" We read, for example of justification in Romans five and verse one where it says:

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."²

¹ Matthew 1:21.

² Romans 5:1.

Whatever justification is, it is really important, because through it we have peace with God. And if you want peace with God, you must be justified.

And then the Bible also tells us in John 17:17 Jesus says:

“Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth.”³

The whole purpose of the Word of God is to sanctify the people of God. And if you are ever to rightly understand the purpose of the Scriptures and the relationship they have to your life, you have to understand them in terms of sanctification.

And so it is these two great words, justification and sanctification, that describe the salvation from sin that Jesus will accomplish in the lives of his people.

Now these two terms, justification and sanctification, are used constantly in the Bible and it is critical for us to understand the relationship they have to one another and the distinction they have from one another if we are to properly understand God’s saving work through his Son Jesus Christ.

So what we want to do in this message today is to endeavor to understand the nature of justification and we want to endeavor to understand the nature of sanctification and the relationship they sustain to each other so that we might better understand the deliverance from sin that Jesus has accomplished from us.

These two terms must not be confused. Justification is not sanctification and sanctification is not justification. They must not be combined and confused, But neither must they be divorced and separated, because you never have justification without having sanctification and you never have sanctification without having justification. So these two things are distinct and separate from each other, but they are always in the company of each other. They are never separate.

So what we want to do then today is to talk about the meaning of justification, the meaning of sanctification, how these things play out in salvation and, thus, better understand the wonderful work that Jesus has done in delivering us from the wrath to come and in bringing us into the wonder and grace and glory of heaven.

So in the first place, then, this morning, let us consider together the nature of man’s problem as a sinner. Now Jesus came to save his people from their sins and he did. We need to understand what sin is and why we need to be saved from it. To understand the solution to sin and the salvation from sin, we must first understand the problem of sin. Solutions don’t make any sense if you don’t know what the problem is that that solution is trying to solve.

So understand, then, that man has two fundamental problems as a sinner. First of all, he is guilty because he has broken God’s law. God has commandments. You are all familiar

³ John 17:17.

with the 10 Commandments. God says, “Thou shalt do certain things.” And we have failed to do those things. On the other hand God said, “Thou shalt not do certain things.” And we went ahead and did them anyway even though he forbade them. And so what sin is, is sin is the transgression of God’s laws. And when we transgress God’s laws we incur the penalty that that law provides for its transgression. And the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. And so when we fail to do what God requires of us or we actually do what he forbids us, we incur the penalty of the law that we have broken and that penalty is eternal death which is separation from God forever in the flames of hell for all eternity in conscious eternal suffering.

Romans three and verse 23 tells us the bad news. It says:

“All have sinned...”⁴

That is, there is not one of us in this room that has either failed to do what God required of us or went ahead and did what God has forbidden to us or both. And so the Bible tells us in Romans three and verse 10:

“There is none righteous, no, not one.”⁵

A righteous person is one who keeps God law. An unrighteous person is one who has broken it. And the Bible says all have sinned and there is none righteous.

And so we read in Isaiah 53 and verse six:

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.”⁶

And that is the problem. Instead of going God’s way, we went our own way. We have gone astray from his will and rule in our lives.

So our first problem is that we are guilty because we have broken God’s laws. We understand that. Secondly, we have a problem in that not only have we broken God’s law, but we also have a polluted and a corrupt heart. That is, we not only do bad things, we do those things because we are bad people. Why does a bird fly? Because it is a fly. Why does a fish swim? Because it is a fish. And why do human beings sin? Because they are sinners. Their very nature is sinful and that is why they do acts of sin.

In the gospel of Mark chapter seven verses 21 to 23 Jesus says:

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit,

⁴ Romans 3:23.

⁵ Romans 3:10.

⁶ Isaiah 53:6.

lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.⁷

And so it is not like you really didn't want to sin, but somebody forced you to. Your own corrupt heart wanted to do wrong and that is why you did wrong.

In Jeremiah chapter 17 and verse nine it says:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”⁸

In Genesis six and verse five it says:

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”⁹

So we have a sin loving, God hating heart and that is the reason why we go ahead and break God's laws. We don't like his laws and we don't like him, so we violate his will for our lives.

So we have done bad in our conduct because we are bad in our nature. And that is why we are unfit for heaven. We are unfit for heaven because of our conduct, what we have done and we are unfit for heaven because of our nature, the kind of people that we are.

And so we are unfit because of what we have done. We have broken God's law. We are unfit because of what we are. We have a sinful heart. In the words of one man we have a bad record and we have a bad heart.

Now God in his mercy and wisdom has devised a plan of salvation that addresses both of these problems. If Jesus came to save his people from their sin—and he did—then he has to address the bad things we have done and he has to address the bad people, the bad hearts that we have. And that is what he has done.

So having seen, then, the nature of man's problem as a sinner—he is guilty because he has broken God's law and he has a polluted and corrupt heart—notice, secondly, God's solution to man's problem as a sinner.

Now what has God done to deal with my bad record and what has God done to deal with my bad heart?

Well, what God has done is he has addressed both of those problems. And he has to address them both because with only addressing one or only addressing the other, he hasn't solved the problem.

⁷ Mark 7:21-23.

⁸ Jeremiah 17:9.

⁹ Genesis 6:5.

Now it is clear that God cannot accept our violations of his law. It is clear that he cannot accept us with the bad record we have and the bad things that we have done.

It says in Revelation chapter 21 and verse 27 regarding heaven:

“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth.”¹⁰

And yet I am defiled and I have defiled God’s law. And as a defiler of God’s law, I can’t enter into heaven because nothing enters into heaven that is defiled.

In Habakkuk one and verse 13 it says of God:

“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.”¹¹

So God can’t have anyone in heaven that is either bad in their nature or has been bad in their behavior. Those people don’t get into heaven. And so I need, with reference to these bad things that I have done, two things. First of all I need forgiveness for my sins that I have committed against God. God says, “Thou shalt not lie,” and I have lied. God says, “Thou shalt not steal,” and I have stolen. God says, “Don’t commit fornication,” I have done that. God says, “Don’t blaspheme my name,” and we have done that. God says, “Remember my sabbath day to keep it holy,” and Lord’s days on end we have gone and done our own agenda.

And so God has his laws and we have broken those laws and because we have, we have incurred the penalty of those laws and that penalty for those broken laws has to be paid in order for God’s justice to be satisfied. And so the penalty for our breaking of God’s law can either be borne in us or, praise God, it can be borne in a substitute.

And what God has done is he has provided a substitute in the person of his Son who came and took our place and took the guilt and the penalty for our sins upon himself and he died for them in our place.

In 1 Peter two in verse 24 it says regarding Jesus:

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.”¹²

And so we see that he Lord Jesus took our sins on himself on the cross and bore the penalty of God against them in our place in his person.

In 1 Peter 3:18 it says:

¹⁰ Revelation 21:27.

¹¹ Habakkuk 1:13.

¹² 1 Peter 2:24.

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust [why?] that he might bring us to God.”¹³

And so we have this wonderful truth that Jesus came to save us from our sins, not by pretending that they didn't happen or saying, “Oh, well, we will just forget that.” No. He came to save us from our sins by taking the penalty of those sins completely upon himself, bearing all the punishment that was due them in himself so that the claims of justice against our sins were satisfied and, therefore, our persons could be forgiven and released.

It says in 1 John two and verse two regarding Jesus:

“And he is the propitiation for our sins.”¹⁴

And that word “propitiation” means to satisfy the wrath of God. Jesus satisfied the wrath of God against our sins by bearing that wrath and exhausting that wrath on the cross so that there is no wrath left for us because all the wrath that was poured out against our sins was poured out on Jesus himself.

So with reference to what Jesus on the cross, he took all of our transgressions of God's law and he simply placed them on himself, bore the penalty of God's wrath against them in our place so that we could then be set free and we could be justly forgiven by God.

And that takes us back to being innocent. But, you know, that is only half of what we need, because if we are going to stand in the presence of God we not only need forgiveness of our sins against God, we also need a positive righteousness to be able to stand in his presence. And how shall I have the righteousness I need to stand in the presence of a righteous God, because you know what a righteous person is? A righteous person is not someone who has just not sinned. A righteous person is someone who has positively obeyed. A righteous person is one who has kept the laws of God.

Now the Bible tells us all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

“There is none that doeth good, no, not one.”¹⁵

God sees more sin in your best obedience than you see in your worst disobedience, because everything we do is corrupted and polluted by our fallen nature and, thus, we can do no works of righteousness as unsaved people. Even the plowing of the wicked is sin. How much more the other sins that they commit?

And so we need not only the forgiveness of our sins, we need a positive righteousness. How shall I have the righteousness I need to stand in the presence of a righteous God? The answer is that Jesus Christ has obtained a perfect righteousness by his perfect

¹³ 1 Peter 3:18.

¹⁴ 1 John 2:2.

¹⁵ Psalm 14:3; 53:3; Romans 3:12.

obedience to God's law while he lived here on earth, which can replace the account of sinners who have no righteousness of their own.

So here is me. I have sinned against God's law. I am guilty. All of my sins are placed on Jesus who bears the penalty for them and now I am forgiven. But I am not righteous because I haven't obeyed God's law and I am not going to be able to. And the reason why I am not going to be able to is because I am still a fallen creature and there is always sin mixed with even my best of goodness. And so what Jesus did is he not only took the burden for our sins upon himself and fully paid the penalty that was owed to him, but then during his life he did perfectly obey God's law in every thought, word and deed, and he obtained a righteousness that was result of his obeying the laws of God. He obeyed the law and God said, "You are righteous." And Jesus takes that righteousness and that obedience to his law and he imputes it to us.

He gets our sins. We get his obedience. So now we stand with no sin clinging to us and a record of perfect obedience to God's law adhering to us.

That is justification.

It says in Romans chapter three and verse 21:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.¹⁶

And so when we believe in Jesus as our Savior, not only are our sins imputed to him, his righteousness is imputed to us. And, as a result, God looks on us and he sees no sin. He sees perfect obedience to God's law and he says, "Well, in relationship to the law I declare this person just."

Never violated the law. Perfectly kept the law. What can God say but that they are just or justified?

And that is what Jesus does for our bad record.

Christ died a substitutionary death to give me forgiveness and Christ lived a substitutionary life to give me righteousness. And on that basis my bad record is cleared in heaven and I am accepted by God as being one who has kept his law. God forgives my sins. He imputes his righteousness to me and on that grounds declares me justified.

Well, half my problem has been solved. I am now justified. My bad record has been dealt with. My transgressions are forgiven. My obedience has been imputed to me. But what about my bad heart? What about what is inside me? What has God done to deal

¹⁶ Romans 3:21-22.

with my bad heart? We see what he has done to deal with my bad record. What has he done to deal with my bad heart?

Well, here is what he has done. In the new covenant he has promised in Ezekiel 36:26:

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”¹⁷

In other words, what God promises is not just to take care of our record by the life and death of Jesus. He also promises to take out our corrupt nature and give us a new nature that is being renewed in righteousness and holiness before God every day.

And so in 2 Corinthians five and verse 17 it says:

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”¹⁸

And so this business of taking out our heart of stone and giving us a heart of flesh, taking out our old nature and giving us a new nature is not a process, people. That is an event. It is what the Bible calls being born again. It is what the Bible calls a spiritual resurrection. It is what the Bible calls a new creation. It is what happens at conversion.

And so in Colossians three and in verse nine he says:

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.¹⁹

So what does God do? Not only does he clear up our record, he cleans up our persons by taking out that sin loving, God hating heart and giving us a God loving sin hating heart.

And so Christ has given to me a new heart, a new nature that now loves God and hates sin. And while it is not a perfect new heart, it is a radically different heart than I had before which is increasingly being renewed into the image of God.

That is sanctification.

Justification deals with my bad record, what I did that is forgiven and to that record is added Christ's obedience.

Sanctification deals with my bad heart, what I am. He takes out my corrupt, sin loving, God hating heart and he gives me a new God loving, sin hating heart. And as a result, I become a different person, so different than it is like I have been born again, a new

¹⁷ Ezekiel 36:26.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

¹⁹ Colossians 3:9-10.

person. When you were born the first time you were born who you were, but when you are born again you are born to be somebody different. And the reason why is because your parents gave you a fallen heart from Adam. And when you are born again the Spirit gives you a new heart from God.

And that is why Christians behave radically differently after they get saved than they did before they got saved, because they have obtained a completely new nature.

And so this distinction between justification and sanctification is crucial. Justification is complete at the moment of conversion. It cannot be improved on in any way. Forgiveness is imparted. Righteousness is imputed. It is instantaneous and it cannot be improved on. You will never be more justified in the future than you are the day that you are converted.

Sanctification, on the other hand, is begun at conversion and will not be complete until we go to heaven and it is progressive. And so God takes out our old nature. He gives us a new nature, but it is not a perfect new nature. It has to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And it has to mortify sin and it has to continue to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

And so there is this dramatic transformation and there is this ongoing conformation to the image of Christ until there is ultimate glorification in heaven. And so sanctification is a process that begins with regeneration and then growth in Christ and then perfection in holiness when we die and go to be with the Lord.

Justification, on the other hand, happens all at once at the moment of conversion, never improves because it is perfect when it is done.

Now I want to continue to draw out the distinction between justification and sanctification and then we will come to some applications, first of all the concern is different. Justification concerns our guilt and our legal standing and our bad record, the bad things we have done and the good things we have failed to do. Sanctification concerns our pollution and moral condition and what we are as people in our nature which then makes us want to do the bad things that we do or makes us want to do the good things that we do after we become saved.

And so in justification, it deals with our guilt and legal standing and our bad behavior. Sanctification deals with our pollution and our moral condition and our bad heart.

Secondly, this sphere of operation is different. In justification the sphere of operation is legal external and objective to our persons. In other words, we are here, right? And so God takes by imputation our sins and he places them all on Jesus. And then he takes by imputation all the obedience of Jesus and he places them on us. And we are passive in that process. It is objective to us as something God does by imputation. It is something he does by declaration. And here God makes a declaration concerning us. He says, "I

count this person as righteous, as having never violated my law, as having perfectly kept my law. I declare them to be justified.”

And so justification is in the sphere of God’s legal acts towards us.

Sanctification is in the sphere of the experiential and the internal and the subjective where we are changed in our persons and that is what we feel when you get saved. When you get saved and you are a new person in Christ you feel that. You feel clean. You feel new. You feel different. Suddenly you love God and you love his people and you hate sin and that is experiential. You feel that because it is what is done in you. It changes your person.

And so justification changes your standing before God. Sanctification changes your person in relationship to God.

And so in sanctification God does something in us. In justification he does something for us. Justification is done, if you will, in the courtroom of God where God just makes declarations about us. But sanctification is done in the operating room of God where God actually works in us and on us.

You walk into a courtroom, the judge makes declarations about you, right? And you walk out the same person as you walked in. It is just the judge has made some declarations about you. But you go to a hospital and you go in the operating room, you don’t come out the same person you went in. They did some stuff to you. They cut on you. They took stuff out. They put stuff in and you walk out a different person than you walked in and that is sanctification.

And so in sanctification, God works in us. He takes out our corrupt heart. He gives us a new righteous heart. In justification he just simply makes a declaration regarding us.

So justification is what God does through Christ for us. Sanctification is what God does through the Holy Spirit in us.

So the concern is different. Yes, the sphere of operation is different. The measure of the effect is different.

In justification there is a once for all declaration that the sinner is not guilty and accepted as righteous based on the sacrificial, substitutionary death of Christ and based on the imputation of Christ’s substitutionary obedience to the law of God wrought on our behalf. And all believers possess this equally and completely at conversion. No believer is more justified than any other believer. We all have equal justification which is perfect, final, complete, finished and absolute justification.

But in sanctification there are degrees of progress and growth and while we all receive regenerate hearts and we are all born again, yet in this life some mature more than others. Some bring forth fruit 30 fold and some 60 fold and some 100 fold. Some are more

renewed into the image of God than others in their behavior and their attitudes. Now at death we are all going to be equally sanctified. We are all going to attain that perfection that is reflective of the perfection, the moral perfection of Jesus Christ. When he shall appear we will be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Then we will all be the souls of just men made perfect, but until then there is going to be variation in the degrees of sanctification while there is no variation in the degree of justification that we all have.

Now in understanding the relationship between justification and sanctification there are two things we must not do. First of all we must not confuse justification and sanctification. We must not confuse them. My acceptance with God has nothing whatever to do with my degree of sanctification. My acceptance with God is based entirely on my justification, Romans 5:1. Therefore being justified by faith, I have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, period, end of sentence.

The knowledge that I have forgiveness and the knowledge that I have righteousness that is perfect and based on free grace, that it is perfect and complete and certain is what will save me from despair and discouragement and hopelessness and bondage as I struggle with my sins as a Christian.

As a Christian, we understand that my forgiveness is complete, my righteousness is perfect, my acceptance is absolute while my behavior still leaves a lot to be desired.

And when in the pursuit of holiness you stumble and fall and fail and feel so wretched, remember that the pursuit of holiness is not the basis of your acceptance with God. Your acceptance with God rests on the merits of Jesus Christ alone. And from the pit of failure you can look through tears of repentance and cry out:

Guilty, helpless, vile we.
Spotless Lamb of God is he.
Full atonement, can it be?
Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Understanding the doctrine of justification is the rock to which you cling when you find yourself struggling against sin and finding yourself repeatedly defeated in that struggle. And you feel like how could God ever want me back again. God never tossed you away. And the reason why he never tossed you away is because you are perfectly righteous in his sight. All of your sins, past, present and future, have been imputed to Christ. He bore all of the wrath against them. They will never be held against you. And all of Christ's obedience to the law of God were imputed to you and so when God looks at you he says, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

And so his is the antidote to despair and to condemnation is know that my acceptance with God is based entirely on the work of Christ alone and has nothing whatever to do with my performance.

So we must never confuse justification and sanctification. Justification is the ground of your acceptance with God, plus nothing.

But, my second point, not only must we not confuse these, we must not divorce them. We must never divorce justification and sanctification from each other. And let no one think he has ever been justified from his sins when he has not received a new heart that loves God's law and is being continually renewed in God's image.

And, you see, this is the antidote to presumption and neglect. There are people who emphasize justification to the point to where they say sanctification doesn't matter. You believe in Jesus. He saves you and therefore it doesn't matter how you live, because you are not saved by works anyway and your salvation is based on the works of Jesus, so how you behave is irrelevant. And, thus, they say you can be saved and live like hell and go to heaven.

Listen. When Jesus saves people from their sins he doesn't just deal with their bad record. He also deals with their bad heart and he gives them a new heart and because they have a new heart they will not live like hell. They cannot live like hell. They don't want to live like hell. And when from time to time because of the temptation of the world and the flesh and the devil they start to, they can't stand it and they repent and they come back to Jesus Christ and renew holiness and obedience, because they are sanctified, because they have gotten a new heart and that new heart loves holiness and righteousness and it hates sin. And though the flesh still loves sin and there is this battle between the flesh and the Spirit so that you can't do the things you would like to do, which is live a perfect life, nevertheless, you delight in the law of God after the inward man and you long after it and you continue to pursue it by the grace of God and with the help and enablement of the Spirit of God and the means of grace.

In Hebrews 10 verses 11 to 17 it speaks of the combination of this justification and this sanctification. It says in Hebrews 10:11-17:

“And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”²⁰

Animal sacrifices can never take away sin. The Roman Catholic sacrifice of the mass can never take away sin.

But this man [Jesus], after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.²¹

Those are the people he has perfected forever. Those are the people he has justified. Those that he sanctified. And so there is no indication of a new birth. There is no

²⁰ Hebrews 10:11.

²¹ Hebrews 10:12-14.

indication of a new heart and a new desire. Then there is no grounds to believe that he has ever perfected them in justification.

“Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before...”²²

Here is the new covenant, people.

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.”²³

What is that? Sanctification, being born again.

“And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”²⁴

What is that? Justification.

And, you see, if you are a participant in the salvation of the new covenant that Jesus wrought, not only will your sins and iniquities be remembered no more, but his law has been put in your heart and in your mind and that is how you think and that is where you want to go. That is how you live.

And so we must not confuse them. Our justification is the ground of our acceptance, not our sanctification, but our sanctification is part and parcel of the salvation that Jesus brings to those that he justifies because he doesn't just forgive us and impute his righteousness to us and leave us to live in sin, but he forgives us and he imputes his righteousness to us and then he puts his law in our hearts and in our minds. He gives us a new desire to obey his Word and his will. And it is those people that he has saved and is saving and shall save from their sins.

He saves us judicially from our sins in justification. He saves us personally from the practice of our sins in sanctification.

And so it is those whose hearts have a love for God's law and those whose minds are filled with God's words. It is those whose sins and iniquities are remembered no more and those alone.

So as we look at how God saves, he saves us by grace through faith in Christ alone. And then he saves us from the practice of sin by renewing our natures, gradually transforming us into the image of Christ. And then when we die making us like him and having our spirits made just as well as our records so that our justification which always has been perfect is met by our sanctification that finally becomes perfect. And both our record and our persons are perfect for all eternity. And that is how God saves.

²² Hebrews 10:15.

²³ Hebrews 10:16.

²⁴ Ibid.

“...thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”²⁵

And that is the process of salvation.

And so as you read your Bible and you come across this word “justify” or “justification” and “sanctify” or “sanctification” or “holy” hopefully these perspectives will help you to grasp what part and aspect of salvation is being addressed. And as you go through life, recognize that my acceptance is perfect, my struggle is difficult, but the success of my struggle is not the grounds of my acceptance. The success of Jesus’ struggle is the ground of my acceptance. My struggle is simply the sign that I have been accepted. And if there is no struggle, there has been no acceptance.

So we struggle because we are accepted not in order to be accepted. You have got to get the horse in front of the cart. Justification comes first. Sanctification follows. If you ever mix those up, you become a Roman Catholic. Don’t go there, because what it will bring is despair or self righteousness. If you think your acceptance is based on your performance, that if you perform really well, then then you are pretty good stuff, holier than those people. But if you are honest with yourself and the law of God and you know how bad you really are and you think that your performance is the ground of your acceptance, you are going to go into despair.

Let the ground of your hope and acceptance be in the work of Jesus and let your struggle against your sin be done in the light of it knowing that he which hath begun a good work in you will continue to perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. And that is why, people, you will make it, because God is going to be faithful to work in you, to will and to do after his good pleasure.

Let us pray together.

Father, we thank you so much for our Lord Jesus. We thank you that he came to save his people from their sins. And oh, our Father, we pray that we might just revel and rejoice and rest in the saving work of Jesus, giving us forgiveness, giving us righteousness. Father, thank you also that he changed our hearts and he made us into new creations so that we would want to do new things, so that we would leave behind the sin that is so destructive in our lives, so that we would begin to practice righteousness which is so liberating and joy filling. Thank you for grace. Thank you for mercy. Thank you for Jesus. We do believe in him alone, Father, as our Savior from sin.

Lord, we express these things in the name of our Savior the Lord Jesus. Amen.

²⁵ Matthew 1:21.