

Is Justification a “Component” of Salvation?

Bernie Gillespie

December 14, 2008

Justification by faith is essential to salvation. It is the center of one’s relationship with God. Failing to understand either the importance of justification or its nature is a serious problem. Ideas that cause us to misunderstand justification directly affect our faith and our saving relationship with God.

In the discussion of the nature of justification, I have addressed in previous blogs what I believe are some of the wrong and harmful notions of justification by faith. So far we have talked about the idea of “re-justification.” As I shared:

The error of the term “re-justification” is the same as the mistaken idea of “transformational justification.” Justification is a once-for-all-time reality that has vital, ongoing consequences in the future life of the Christian. The justified person does not need to be re-justified. Just like in our natural, physical birth, a person is born once. This event is the beginning of a long life of being a “born” person. But there is no need to be born (in the natural sense) again or repetitively. This fact is so obvious that it sounds ridiculous to ever state it. But, the idea of “re-justification” is just as ridiculous as saying a person has to be repetitively born . . . Therefore, using the phrase “re-justification” is as unnecessary as saying one must be “born again” again.

In another blog I talked about the idea of “instantaneous” justification. The use of this term assumes that there are parts or levels of justification, the first of which is instantaneous. I wrote:

In the Bible, when a person believed God, they were justified at that moment. “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Rom. 4:3 ESV) The context of Romans 4 is Paul discussing the nature of justification as illustrated in the faith of Abraham. In Galatians, Paul teaches that NT believers are children of Abraham by faith. (Galatians 3: 6-14) When was Abraham counted righteous? When he believed God.

The same response goes for the concept “initial” justification. It faces the same problem.

First of all, just like “re-justification” and “instantaneous” justification the idea of “initial” justification is unwarranted. All of these qualifiers change the biblical meaning of justification by faith as it is taught in Scripture. As I have stated, justification is *not* a process, the equal of sanctification. It is a once-for-all-time work of God. The fundamental reason it is not a process is this: the righteousness by which one is justified is Christ’s righteousness and not one’s own.

Justification is a whole, occurring at the moment of truth faith (as I recently blogged) and is effective for the rest of one’s walk of faith. Justification as an event is not a process,

Is Justification a “Component” of Salvation?

Bernie Gillespie *December 14, 2008*

neither is it a progressive work, as if we become increasingly justified or need to renew or recharge our justification. Nonetheless, its effect is an ongoing reality in the life of the justified. There is a progressive effect of justification on our lives as we learn the power of living the justified life. This is certainly a process as we live by faith. But this does not define the meaning of justification as a progressive process.

Once a person is justified by faith in Christ, they stand in right relationship with God, since the righteousness of Christ is counted to them by God (Romans 4). Justification can only be progressive if Jesus becomes progressively more saving than he was when one was “initially” justified. The only way justification can fail or “wear out” is if Jesus’ righteousness can fail or fade. The only reason we would need to recharge or add to our justification is if Jesus would weaken or lose power to be our mediator before God. Thank God, “because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (Hebrews. 7:24, 25 NIV) As we sing, “the blood will never lose its power.”

“But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

Those Jesus justifies by His blood, He keeps justified by His blood.

In searching the entire Bible I have found nothing to support the idea that justification comes in installments or phases. Those God justifies, he justifies at once and completely. No less an authority than Jesus illustrates:

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
(Luke 18:13-14 NIV)

The tax collector prayed a simple but potently, authentic prayer of repentance. “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” He was truly humble before God in simple faith. At that Jesus says he went home justified. There is no thought of this being an “instantaneous” justification, or “initial” justification, with the full amount or portion to come later. He was not partially justified. He was fully and completely justified in God’s sight right then. And that justification went with him as he went home. The justification that began at the Temple became the basis of his relationship with God later in his domicile. It was not stages of justification, but it was one completed justification that was effective for all of his life.

This same is true for justification as a “component.” The term component implies that a thing is a part, module, piece, element or section of a larger thing. I guess the word component is used because it reflects the influence of our technological society. But, for

Is Justification a “Component” of Salvation?

Bernie Gillespie December 14, 2008

all intents, it would be clearer for those speaking of “initial” justification to say that justification is a piece or part of the rest of salvation. But is that true?

It is true that justification is part of the work of salvation, but that does not mean one is right with God *partially* through justification and then *more* right with God by, let’s say, sanctification (holiness) or Spirit baptism. This is not the way the Bible speaks. What the Bible says is, “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (Romans 8:30 NIV) [I find those who struggle with the meaning of justification, or hold false views about it, cannot properly understand this verse.] What Romans 8:30 means is that God is the author of salvation, from start to finish. He begins the plan in eternity past (predestines), then he carries out His plan by becoming a man, dying and rising again to purchase salvation, then he manifests it in our personal life by opening our hearts through the New Birth (calls). The New Birth occurs when the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to hear the Gospel and trust in God’s salvation through Christ (justifies). Then, the new life that God begins in us He carries out through our sanctification, until he finally glorifies us with Himself in Heaven. All this is of God. Justification is a part of this. But, *it not a part of the steps we follow to gain our salvation. It is part of the work that God does.*

To say that justification is part of something has rightly understood. It is part of the great work *that God does* through Christ to save us. Justification is not a component, step or the beginning of a salvation that we gain and maintain by our obedience. If that is the way “component” justification is conceived, it is not biblical.

Justification is a part of God’s golden chain of salvation (Romans 8:30). It is an unbreakable chain. It is unbreakable because God’s promise is sure and eternal. One who is justified does not need to get more justified, or need another “component” to get them to Heaven. That’s because salvation is by Christ. Christ’s work is finished. Christ is not a component of salvation. There are no components to Christ. Christ is salvation. The person who trusts in Christ has all they need to go to Heaven. And that is what justification is.

So what about Spirit baptism or sanctification? They are the blessings Christ gives to us as a result of justification. The one who is right with God by faith is given the Holy Spirit to dwell with them forever. That is a gift. (It is not something that someone needs to pray and pray for until they speak with tongues). Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer to transform them into the likeness of Christ. This work is not to save the believer, but is a gift to the believer *because* they are saved. It is Christ shaping his child into his likeness.

To make Spirit baptism or sanctification a part of or a stage of justification is confusing the gift with the giver. It is making the gift that comes through salvation the means of salvation. That is not possible because only Christ saves. It is neither my spiritual experience nor my personal holiness that saves me. It is Jesus’ sacred once-for-all death and resurrection that makes me right with God. When we have Christ we have all His

Is Justification a “Component” of Salvation?

Bernie Gillespie *December 14, 2008*

gifts. Not because we earned them, followed the stages, or put together the “components” by our obedience, but because He is infinitely merciful, and He is enough.