

DOES DAVID K. BERNARD BUY INTO THE “NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL”?

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In some ways, Bernard sounds like he believes in an orthodox view of the relationship between justification and sanctification. He says that sanctification is the result of justification and that justification must produce good works. These are acceptable statements. But, when he says that justifying faith is obedience, he falls from the tightrope of orthodox balance into legalism.¹ He says that saving faith is obedience because he has to in order to defend the Acts 2: 38 model of salvation. To require one to keep Acts 2: 38, one must require obedience. This means that the sinner must obey to be saved. By this view of salvation obedience is made a *precondition* for justification rather than a *result* of justification. Bernard’s pattern would look like this:

Faith + Obedience -----> Justification

In contrast, the orthodox interpreters would lay out the sequence in this way:

Faith -----> Justification + Obedience

David Bernard	Classic Orthodox View
Faith + Obedience -----> Justification.	Faith -----> Justification + Obedience.

(Figure 7)

Following Bernard’s pattern equates justification with the work of sanctification. Sanctification is the result of two things: 1) the divine work of God through the Holy Spirit to *make* the believer righteous, and 2) the obedient *cooperation* of the believer. Justification is not like sanctification in these two things. It is solely the divine act of God that justifies the wicked. It is a gift and is not the result of our obedient cooperation. It is not because of the obedience of the wicked or one’s supposed righteous.

¹Legalism takes many forms. In essence, it is adding our obedience to the merits of Christ in order to obtain salvation.

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It is out of God's sheer grace - *alone*. When obedience is front-loaded into the conversion experience, justification becomes equated with sanctification and legalism emerges.

All Christians must make a crucial distinction between "justifying grace" and "sanctifying grace." This is another way of saying, we must always remember the difference between justification and sanctification.

Nearly every man and woman I've met who has struggled with legalism has had a faulty understanding of how justification and sanctification are related to each other, and how they're distinct. We must distinguish between justifying grace and sanctifying grace, but never separate them.²

As to the *second reason*, Bernard includes in justification the work of Christ done *within us*.

Justification is not primarily a legal transaction based on acceptance of propositions, but it is a work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who yield to God's grace.³

Justification by faith thus means receiving and relying upon the saving work of the Holy Spirit rather than relying upon one's own merits, abilities, and efforts.⁴

Bernard attempts to build a case for justification as the work of the Spirit within the believer by a unique line of reasoning. While he assures that he operates under the Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich Greek Lexicon definition of justification,⁵ he draws on James D. G. Dunn as validation of his belief that justification means *both* to "count righteous," and to "make righteous." It is an uncreative attempt because Rome proposes the same notion, although these two ideas are mutually exclusive. This fact true by definition. It is also evidenced by the hundreds of years of debate between Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars over the etymology and meaning of justification. Bernard continues to support his thinking by

²C. J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002), p. 32.

³"The Role of the Holy Spirit in Justification," Op. Cit.

⁴Ibid.

⁵"To be acquitted, pronounced and treated as righteous."

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referring to scholars who say that the “righteousness of God” means the “saving actions of God,” and therefore, “to be justified means to have God working inside the one justified.”⁶

I wish to point out that Bernard appears to be heavily influenced in this subject by James D. G. Dunn, and with him, the resulting theology of the “new perspective on Paul.” Dunn, along with E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright, is one of the strongest advocates of the “New Perspective” on the theology of Paul. This “New Perspective” asserts that Paul’s doctrine of justification was not a response against works righteousness, but that it was an attempt to convert and incorporate the Gentiles into the Christian Church. Within the new “New Perspective” it is assumed that the Reformation theology of Luther misled Protestantism by a misinterpretation of Paul’s Gospel which led to an over emphasis on justification by faith, and that, a forensic rather than a mystical one. The conclusion of many who follow the “New Perspective” is that God has two ways or covenants of salvation: 1) covenantal nomism (law keeping) for the Jews, while 2) the law-free gospel is God’s way of salvation for the Gentiles.⁷

The New Perspective is not really new.⁸ It is the product of theological liberalism and its polemical reaction to Reformation theology.⁹ It was advocated in some fashion as early as 1853 by Lipsius, Sabatier, Ludermann, Weizsacker, and Wrede.¹⁰ Responding to Wrede’s view, J.

⁶“The Role of the Holy Spirit in Justification,” Op. Cit.

⁷To be fair to Dunn, he says that he is “leaning” toward the one covenant view. Cp. Dunn, *Parting of the Ways*, p. 250.

⁸Several excellent treatments challenging the New Perspective are: Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2001), Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), Mark S. Seifrid, *Christi, our Righteousness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ((Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2002).

⁹Those groups who have an aversion to Reformation theology like to side with liberals on isolated points without fully taking into consideration all the unorthodox assumptions that undergird those points. This rejection of Reformation thinking makes strange bedfellows of liberals and radical groups.

¹⁰Cp. footnote 13, Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 78.

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Gresham Machen, a champion of a forensic view of justification (and theological orthodoxy), explained:

The real reason why Paul was devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith was not that it made possible the Gentile mission, but rather that it was true. Paul was not devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith because of the Gentile mission; he was devoted to the Gentile mission because of the doctrine of justification by faith.¹¹

My central point is that Bernard is placing great weight for his understanding of justification upon the theology of someone who has taken a less than orthodox path. Dunn, for all his good scholarship,¹² leans toward certain conclusions, developed in theological liberalism, that discount the importance of the forensic view of justification. It is a dangerous practice to rest one's arguments on a certain meaning of justification which is more acceptable to liberal scholars than those who have fought for orthodoxy. I believe those like Bernard in Pentecostal circles, who follow this path, do so because of their inherent allergy to Reformation theology. Certain aspects of Reformation theology challenge the key Pentecostal assumptions. In order to make a place for Pentecostal practice and piety, Reformation theology's influence must be discredited or minimized.

Citing one of a number of such Pentecostal scholars, Frank Macchia¹³ believes that it is time for Pentecostals to move away from the Reformation view of a forensic understanding of justification toward a view which incorporates the inward work of the Spirit as the basis of justification. I will only briefly mention that many of those who are taking this direction, are those who are strong advocates of the ecumenical role

¹¹Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*, (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 90. Quoting from J. Gresham Machen's, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1921), pp. 278-79.

¹²A good portion of Dunn's work is favored by Pentecostal/Charismatics because it is seen by them as supporting much of their theology and many of their practices and ideas against the seemingly overwhelming volumes of Evangelical scholarship.

¹³Frank D. Macchia, *Justification and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Reflection on the Doctrine by which the Church Stands or Falls*, Presidential Address: Society for Pentecostal Studies, Northwest College of the Assemblies of God, Kirkland, Washington, March 16, 2000.

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of Pentecostalism. These hope for Pentecostalism to be the bridge between Protestant and Roman Catholic unity. It is no coincidence that those who work toward this reunion are the same ones who are strongly advocating a Roman Catholic view of justification. That is because there will be no unity with Rome until Protestants defer to the Roman Catholic view of justification. I believe that Macchia and Bernard, in their own ways, are doing just that.

Bernard acknowledges Macchia influence on his study of this subject. Even his paper presented at the recent UGST Symposium – “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Justification” – takes a similar title, even more the subject, as Macchia’s earlier SPS presidential address. I am not sure how aware David Bernard is of these implications. I only warn that his theology of justification is playing into the hands of a movement that favors the Roman Catholic view of justification. Any Christian group that is naive to these issues, their history and present trends, can be misled into a false view of the Gospel. This a serious issue and worthy of careful and thoughtful examination. For this reason I reject Bernard’s attempt to led the UPCI into a view that defines justification as that which the Spirit does *inside* the believer, as opposed to Paul’s teaching of justification as that which God does *outside* the believer in declaring the believer righteous through faith in the finished work of Christ.

When he makes justification synonymous with Acts 2:38, he includes repentance, water baptism and Spirit-baptism within justification, rather than as a result of it. Repentance is a change within the believer. Spirit-baptism includes the indwelling of the Spirit within the life of the believer. The UPCI form of receiving the Spirit includes a number of “conditions,” such as: total surrender, earnest prayer, yielding all to God, forsaking sin, et. al. This makes Spirit-baptism more focused on what takes place *in* the believer, than the free gift of God coming from *outside* the believer. This is like Luther’s criticism of Carlstadt’s teaching on the reception of the Holy Spirit: “He wants to teach you not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit.”¹⁴ This exactly characterizes the UPCI and David Bernard’s teaching on Spirit-reception.

This view makes justification a work done in the believer because of what the believer has done, rather than outside of him. It also places the stress on how we “get the Spirit,” rather than how God gives us the Spirit

¹⁴Luther’s Works, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), Vol. XXXX, p.147.

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through faith in what Christ has done. This emphasis opens the door for confusing the work of sanctification with justification:

The great truth of justification by faith, however, does not deal with the acts of God within the believer, but with the saving acts of God outside the believer. First, the ground of a man's acceptance with God unto life eternal is sheer grace. ". . . being justified freely by His grace . . ." Rom. 3:24. The Greek word here translated freely is elsewhere translated without cause. Grace is not conditioned on any quality in the human heart. So far is it from relating to a quality within man that the apostle declares that this "grace . . . was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." 2 Tim. 1:9. It is a quality in God's heart, His disposition to be kind and merciful to those who are lost and undeserving. Grace means God's attribute of accepting those who are unacceptable -- not excepting those whom He has previously sanctified. Yet God cannot allow His grace to override His justice. The rule of law must be upheld. God must have valid grounds to forgive sinners and to accept them as righteous. Those grounds are also completely outside of us.¹⁵

The problem of making justification a work within the believer cannot be over emphasized. It really points to the whole problem many people have with understanding the meaning of justification. As long as one defines justification as including those things that happen within us for our right standing with God, one will misunderstand the true nature of justification and blur the relationship between it and sanctification.

In the *third reason*, Bernard confuses justification with sanctification, because he teaches that sanctification contributes to one's salvation:

Holiness is essential to salvation. . . After the new birth experience, a conflict arises between the flesh and the born again spirit. This battle is a battle for holiness, and we must win it in order to be saved.¹⁶

This means we should be willing to do anything to make

¹⁵Robert D. Brinsmead, "Sanctification -- Its Mainspring," Present Truth, Feb., 1975, Vol. 4., No. 1, p. 46.

¹⁶Bernard, *In Search of Holiness*, p. 11.

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ourselves acceptable to God, regardless of the sacrifice. We must be holy and separated in order to be acceptable.¹⁷

The new birth is the initial experience of salvation, but the work of salvation does not end there. There is also the continuing work of sanctification, a process of becoming progressively more Christ-like that begins at the new birth and leads to sinless perfection in the life to come. This work takes place as we submit daily to the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit (II Thessalonians 2: 13). Just as we must be born again to see the kingdom of God (John 3: 3-5), so we must pursue holiness, or sanctification, in order to see the Lord. “Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12: 14, NKJV). “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (NIV). The new birth will have no eternal value unless the born-again person continues to walk by faith and live after the new nature of the Spirit, allowing God to complete the process that began at the new birth.¹⁸

Justification only is the ground of our salvation. Faith alone in the finished work of Christ is the only basis of a saving relationship with God. Sanctification, however, is the application of that salvation to the believer’s life. It is not the basis of one’s salvation. It is the out-working of salvation. I believe Bernard blurs this important difference:

Faith then keeps the born-again person in a continuing relationship with Christ, which includes continuing obedience and holiness of life through the power of God’s indwelling Spirit.¹⁹

He blurs the distinction between the ongoing, objective work of justification and the inward nature of sanctification. He says that obedience and holiness of life is what keeps a person in a relationship with Christ. Rather than faith in the objective work of Christ, trusting in what Christ did for us outside of us on the Cross, it is the inward work of

¹⁷Ibid., 2.

¹⁸Bernard, *Essentials of Holiness*, (Hazelwood, Word Aflame Press, 2000), p. 9f.

¹⁹Bernard, *The Message of Romans*, p. 103.

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holiness of life produced by our obedient cooperation with the Spirit:

Philippians 2: 12-13 charges us, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God actually performs the work of salvation, providing the desire and the power to live righteously, but we must reverently and watchfully implement holiness in our lives. One writer explained, "The pursuit of holiness is a joint venture between God and the Christian. No one can attain any degree of holiness without God working in his life, but just as surely no one will attain it without effort on his own part. God has made it possible for us to walk in holiness. But He has given to us the responsibility of doing the walking; He does not do that for us. . . . We pray for victory when we know we should be acting in obedience."²⁰

The way Bernard addresses works and obedience in connection with justification makes justification sound more like sanctification:

The *evidence or fruit* of justification is words and works. Jesus said we will be justified or condemned in the day of judgement by our words (Matthew 12: 36-37). The Book of James says we are justified by works (James 2: 24). These teachings do not contradict Romans, but speak of being justified in the sense of "shown to be righteous." If we have faith, we will produce good words and good works as evidence of our living faith. If we do not have faith, our words and works will be evil, and they will condemn us.²¹

This last statement is generally sound and true. However, in its context, one is given the impression that one must look to works for the assurance that one is justified:

We cannot separate faith from commitment, response, and action. Romans 3: 21-25 teaches that acceptable works can only come from faith; James 2: 14-26 teaches that works will always come from acceptable faith. Romans says we are

²⁰Bernard, *Essentials of Holiness*, p. 22.

²¹Bernard, *The Message of Romans*, p. 118.

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justified by faith; James says the kind of faith that justifies will necessarily produce works.²²

I don't have as much problem with this statement, except in the way it relates to the next. Here Bernard makes justification by obedience:

The scriptural record of his justification by faith was fulfilled – brought to pass, accomplished, ratified – by his obedience. If Abraham had refused to obey God, his "faith" would have been shown deficient. It would not have been the kind of saving faith both Romans and James present.²³

To summarize, *we are declared righteous only through faith – obedient, works-producing faith – not through conformity to law or deeds done to earn salvation (Romans 3:21-4:25). We are shown to be righteous only through works* that genuine faith inevitably produces, not by mental profession or a profession of faith standing alone (James 2:14-26).²⁴

In these quotes Bernard fails to recognize the fundamental distinction of Law and Gospel²⁵ taught throughout Scripture. If he properly recognized this doctrine, he would not include obedience within justification. The Bible sees justification occurring *through faith and not obedience*. It is the work of Christ done outside us, not within us:

And the object of the faith is Christ. Faith, then, according to the Christian view means simply receiving a gift. To have faith in Christ means to cease trying to win God's favor by one's own character; the man who believes in Christ simply accepts the sacrifice which Christ offered on Calvary. The result of such faith is a new life and all good works; but the salvation itself is an absolutely free gift of God.²⁶

²²Ibid., p. 119.

²³Ibid., p. 120.

²⁴Ibid., p. 121.

²⁵Cp. my writings on [Law and Gospel](#)

²⁶J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1923, reprint 1981), p. 143.

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On the other hand, the Bible speaks of sanctification as mainly that which involves our obedient cooperation with the grace of God working within us. It is not the basis of our salvation but the resulting benefit of our salvation. Confusing these can lead one to believe that one is right with God on the basis of one's inward holiness and personal obedience.

Here is the test for Bernard's teaching: Can a person refuse his view of water baptism and be right with God? Can a person refuse his view of tongues as evidence and be right with God? If not, then his view of these things is best defined as a work. His use of the word obedience confirms that in his teaching it is by obedience to a work that one is justified. It does not have to be Exodus 20 that one obeys in order to make it a work. When we perform anything as a means of obtaining what God gives by grace, we make it a work:

Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT." (Romans 4:4-8 NAS)

The tip off is the word "obedience." Using that word in reference to justification makes it salvation by works. Works is defined by that with which Paul contrasts it: "believes in him who justifies the ungodly." The intent of Paul is to establish that one is righteous, or right with God, by faith in Christ's works and not by one's personal works. One who attempts to say that Paul is only speaking of "works of the Law" but not other kinds of works, really misses the larger or central point of this text. It is a direct contrast between salvation by human ability as opposes to salvation by God's ability. Justification is the result of the grace of God because of human inability. Any attempt to insert human ability or obedience into justification directly undermines Paul's background assumption for justification by grace through faith: the total inability of humans to meet God's demands.

Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, teaches that regeneration *precedes* justification while sanctification *follows* justification. Neither regeneration nor sanctification is separate from justification. Still, they are

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not equated²⁷ with each other. Why is this a problem? If Bernard properly understood the distinctions between regeneration, sanctification and justification, he would not make many of the errors that are spelled out in this paper. Because he sees Acts 2:38 as the New Birth and as the steps of justification, he equates regeneration with justification. Because he sees obedience to the steps of Acts 2:38 the essence of justification he thus equates sanctification with justification.

Regeneration must be prior and distinct from justification because of the nature of sinful humanity. We are not capable, being dead in our sins, to have faith, repent or submit to water-baptism, until God “raises” us to a new nature. This is what happens in regeneration:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:1-9 NAS)

Therefore we cannot be justified – trust in Christ alone for salvation – until we are regenerated, which is God “quickening” us or making us alive with and in Christ.

Sanctification begins with justification, but it is not justification itself. Justification is the verdict of God that we are right with Him because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Because God has given us new life by His Spirit (regeneration) our hearts and minds are freed from the bondage of sin and are able to believe in Christ. Then, because we justified, we are

²⁷Just as my arm and my shoulder are not the same thing, yet they are not separated from each other.

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also sanctified and continue to live a life of sanctification as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit. The critical distinction is whether we make justification the ground of our sanctification, or *vice versa*.

A justified person is a regenerated person; an unjustified person is an *unregenerate* person. A justified person is *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit; the unjustified person is *not indwelt* by the Holy Spirit. In the justified person the work of sanctification has *begun*; in the unjustified person the work of sanctification has *not begun*. It is critical to note that, although these changes are present in the justified person, they are not part of the ground of that person’s justification. The sole ground of justification remains always and ever the righteousness of Christ.²⁸

Sanctification is the result of both God’s acts and ours, whereas justification is entirely an act of God. These may seem to some readers like hair splitting. But it is vitally important to make these distinctions. If we do not, we will be ignorant and vulnerable to false teaching. If salvation includes our obedience then justification is not by grace alone. The truth of the Gospel depends upon grace alone.

David Bernard	Classic Orthodox View
Justification and sanctification treated as the same work.	Justification is distinct but not separate from sanctification. Justification is God imputing righteousness. Sanctification is the Holy Spirit making the believer righteous.

(Figure 8)

²⁸R. C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1999), p. 161.