

Justification and Sanctification

Saved by Grace, Then Called to Walk With Christ

Primary Scripture: Acts 16:30-31; Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 5:1; John 17:17 (KJV)

"We are not saved because we have learned to live the Christian life well. We learn to live the Christian life because, through faith in Jesus Christ, God has saved us."

Introduction - What Must I Do to Be Saved?

There may not be a more important question in Scripture than the one the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Their answer was direct: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:30-31).

That answer matters because Christians sometimes mix together two truths that belong together but are not the same thing: justification and sanctification. When we confuse them, we can begin treating the things that should follow salvation as though they are additional requirements for receiving it.

1. Justification Answers: How Am I Made Right With God?

Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justification is God's declaration that the believer is righteous before Him because of Jesus Christ. It rests on what Christ has done, not on our ability to build a record good enough for God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says we are saved "by grace...through faith," and that salvation is "not of works." Grace means God is giving what we could never earn. Faith is not a work by which we purchase salvation; it is trusting the One who accomplished it for us.

2. The Burden of Proof

Here is a principle I believe helps us read salvation passages carefully. When Scripture gives belief in Jesus Christ as the response to the question of receiving salvation, anyone who adds another requirement bears the burden of showing from Scripture that the added requirement is actually a condition for receiving eternal life - not an act of obedience, discipleship, spiritual growth, or evidence that follows faith.

That does not make obedience unimportant. It makes the gospel clear. We should not place something on the front side of salvation that Scripture places on the other side of it. We come to Christ by faith. Then, as people who belong to Him, we learn what it means to follow Him.

3. Sanctification Answers: How Does a Saved Person Grow?

Jesus prayed in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." Sanctification is the work of God in the believer as He sets us apart and shapes our lives according to His truth. Unlike justification, which speaks of our standing before God, sanctification describes an ongoing life of growth.

That growth involves Scripture, prayer, obedience, correction, worship, fellowship, service, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes growth is encouraging. Sometimes it exposes things in us that need to change.

But none of that means we are trying to earn the salvation Christ already provided.

4. Grace Does Not Make Good Works Unimportant

Ephesians 2 does not stop at verses 8 and 9. Verse 10 says that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The order is beautiful: we are not saved *by* good works, but we are saved *unto* a life in which good works have a proper place.

A changed life does not buy salvation. It can become the fruit of salvation. Obedience matters because Jesus matters. Discipleship matters because the One who saved us is worthy of being followed. Good works are not the root that produces salvation; they belong among the fruit that can grow from a life joined to Christ.

5. We Get Into Trouble When We Reverse the Order

If I begin looking at my performance as the reason God accepts me, I will eventually end up in one of two places. I may become proud because I think I am doing better than somebody else, or I may live in fear because I know how often I fall short. Neither one keeps my eyes where they belong - on Jesus Christ.

The gospel gives us a different foundation. Christ is sufficient. Because my standing rests in Him, I can face areas of my life that need growth without pretending they do not matter and without believing every failure means I must somehow save myself all over again.

6. The Common Denominator Is Jesus Christ

Justification and sanctification are different, but they are not enemies. Jesus Christ stands at the center of both. We are justified through faith in Christ, and the life that follows is a life of learning to walk with Christ.

The same grace that saves us does not tell us to remain unchanged. It gives us a new foundation from which real growth can begin. We do not obey so that Jesus will finally decide to save us. We obey because He is our Lord, because we love Him, and because His way is good.

What Does This Mean for Me Today?

If you are wondering how to be saved, do not make the gospel more complicated than Scripture makes it. Put your trust in Jesus Christ - in the One who died and rose again for you.

And if you have trusted Christ, do not mistake grace for permission to stop growing. Open God's Word. Let Him correct you. Confess sin. Forgive. Serve. Love. Learn obedience. Walk with the Holy Spirit. Not to purchase eternal life, but because eternal life in Christ has changed who you belong to.

Conclusion - Saved by Grace, Growing in Grace

Justification tells me where I stand: accepted before God through faith in Jesus Christ. Sanctification describes the journey that follows: God continuing to work in me as I learn to live as someone who belongs to Him.

We must not confuse the gift with the growth that follows the gift. Salvation is received through faith in Christ. Then, from that secure foundation, we spend the rest of our lives learning to walk with the Savior who saved us.

Faith begins by trusting Christ. And Christian growth continues the same way - depending on Him, listening to His Word, and allowing His grace to shape the way we live.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. Thank You that we do not have to earn what Jesus has already accomplished. Help us to rest in Your grace without becoming careless about the life You have called us to live. Teach us to understand the difference between being justified before You and growing in sanctification. Keep our eyes on Jesus. Through Your Word and Your Holy Spirit, continue shaping our lives so that what we do reflects the One in whom we have believed. May our obedience come from love and gratitude, never from the idea that we can save ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.