

# **The Challenge**

## **Group Discussion Series**

**Challenging the Contemporary  
Presuppositions of the American Church**

### **Session 3**

#### **Discipleship**



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## Introduction

How can Christians change if we don't even know whether we are changeable are not? On the one hand we are supposed to be evangelizing the world, but on the other hand, we don't even know who we are. Are we changeable? Or unchangeable? Change really isn't on the radar screen, it has been replaced with something deemed much more spiritual: "glorifying the Lord." If we change it's about us, not the Lord. Supposedly.

There is one thing for certain; believers have to live like unbelievers in many ways that make up the practical normality of life. Both have to drink water to live. Both have to eat in order to live. Both need shelter. Both need to know a language to communicate. Both benefit from not violating their consciences. Both benefit from the fact that we are creatures of habit. But where does the line cross over to the cursed, "pragmatism"? It would seem that there is no greater sin in our day than practicality.

But is practicality a good thing that Christians should excel in? Is it something that Christians should do better? Christians do not know how practicality fits into discipleship, and many believe it should have no part in discipleship. While others would disagree with that notion, they unwittingly function that way. Confusion reigns in regard to fears that we would "live by lists" and "do's and don'ts." Is it a works issue or a wisdom issue?

## Who are We?

But before we answer the practicality issue (works salvation versus wisdom), we will answer the creaturehood issue. What is the metaphysical makeup of a Christian? What is our being?

Basically, there are four sanctification paradigms that will determine how we live as Christians. This is a paramount consideration because we will function according to what we believe about who we are.

The first is the rejection of infused grace. It posits the idea that no righteousness exists within the believer. This is authentic Calvinism and the model that dominates New Calvinism. Christians do no works in sanctification, but only live by faith. This results in experiencing obedience, but the believer is not really the one performing the act. It would be like passively standing in the rain. You are really not doing anything, but you experience the rain as it falls on you. In this sanctification paradigm, obedience that is imputed to you will be experienced as a willful, joyful, “mere natural flow.” “Duty” is always the result of our “own efforts.”

Two more of the paradigms we will look at are founded in this first one because it originated with the Protestant Reformers. We tend to be what we call ourselves in American Christianity, “Protestants.” So what did the Reformers believe about the metaphysical makeup of a Christian?

The Reformers believed mankind has no righteousness of his own. In Lutheran theology, this is known as *alien righteousness*:

... neither renewal, sanctification, virtues nor good works are . . . our righteousness before God, nor are they to be constituted or set up as a part or cause of our righteousness, or otherwise under any pretext, title, or name whatever in the article of justification as necessary and belonging thereto; but the righteousness of faith consists alone in the forgiveness of sins out of pure grace, for the sake of Christ's merit alone; which blessings are offered us in the promise of the Gospel, and are received, accepted, applied, and appropriated by faith alone. [1]

This is pretty clear: we have no righteousness of our own in sanctification (the Christian life), and righteousness must be “appropriated” by faith alone in the Christian life. In fact, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin believed that water baptism replaced Old

Testament circumcision, and sanctification replaced the Sabbath. Hence, in the same way that people were sentenced to death for working on the Sabbath, Christians will suffer eternal death for doing good works in the Christian life. [2]

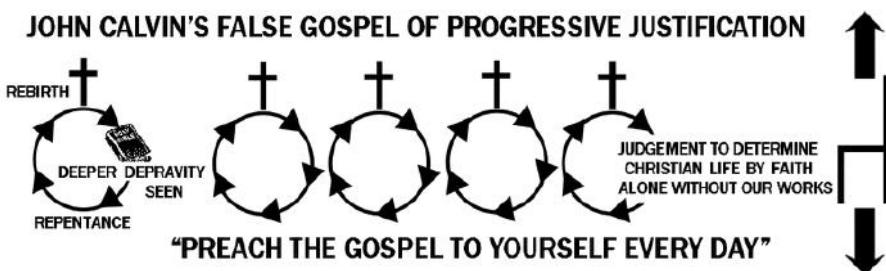
According to the Reformers, sin in the Christian life separates us from salvation, and we must continually seek to remain saved by pursuing the same forgiveness that originally saved us. If we had a righteousness of our own, we wouldn't need to do that. Sin in the Christian life isn't a matter of harmony in the family of God, but a salvific matter. Therefore, the works of Christ's perfect obedience in all things, not just His death, are imputed to our Christian life by faith alone:

Secondly, this passage shows that the gratuitous pardon of sins is given us not only once, but that it is a benefit perpetually residing in the Church, and daily offered to the faithful. For the Apostle here addresses the faithful; as doubtless no man has ever been, nor ever will be, who can otherwise please God, since all are guilty before him; for however strong a desire there may be in us of acting rightly, we always go haltingly to God. Yet what is half done obtains no approval with God. In the meantime, by new sins we continually separate ourselves, as far as we can, from the grace of God. Thus it is, that all the saints have need of the daily forgiveness of sins; for this alone keeps us in the family of God. [3]

Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accordance with the comprehensive summary of our faith and confession presented above, that poor sinful man is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and adopted into sonship and heirship of eternal life,

without any merit or worth of our own, also without any preceding, present, or any subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness [4] .... and appropriated by faith alone [1] ....[in the Christian life].... neither renewal, sanctification, [“neither” other than justification] virtues nor good works are [present tense]. . . our righteousness before God, nor are they to be constituted or set up as a part or cause of our righteousness, or otherwise [justification also] under any pretext, title, or name whatever in the article of justification as necessary and belonging thereto.

To simplify this foundational paradigm of which most of the discipleship constructs of our day flow, the following chart should suffice:



Alternative gospel chart: [17]

The Contemporary terms for this construct is “deep repentance” (a resalvation repentance) coined by Ellen White [5] [6] who was a student of Reformation theology, and “new obedience” [7] which is the EXPERIENCE of the obedience of Christ imputed to us by faith ALONE in the Christian life. The obedience is primarily experienced by perpetual, joyful rebirths of the Spirit. [8] Most Christian living constructs in our day are a variance of this.

The second paradigm posits the idea that Christians remain spiritually dead, but the indwelling Holy Spirit is the only life source within us. As with the first model, we are only righteous positionally. Unlike the first model, righteousness is infused, but like the first, it doesn't change who we are. In both cases, we "manifest" righteous behavior, but it's not us doing it. This isn't all that difficult to understand if you remember the *standing in the rain* example. You experience the rain, but you have nothing to do with its manifestation.

The third model will look like one of the first two, but implements the concept of "yielding." When a person is lost, they are only in the *world* or *sin realm*. When they become saved, the *Spirit realm* is added to their sphere of being. At any given time, they "yield" to one or the other. But we aren't DOING anything, we are merely yielding which leads to experiencing the Spirit realm or participating in the sin realm. In the sin realm, it is actually us doing the work, but we only EXPERIECE the Spirit realm. The famous evangelical JC Ryle contended against this in his day:

In the seventh and last place, is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to think so much of fighting and struggling against sin, but ought rather to "yield themselves to God" and be passive in the hands of Christ? Is this according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it. [9]

An example regarding the experience aspect is a quote from Paul David Tripp's *How People Change* (2006), page 215:

When we think, desire, speak, or act in a right way, it isn't time to pat ourselves on the back or cross it off our To Do List. Each time we do what is right, we are experiencing [underline added] what Christ has supplied for us. In Chapter 11, we introduced some of the fruit Christ produces. We will expand the discussion here.

Hence, supposedly, we only experience the works Christ has supplied, but it is not us doing them. As far as “in us” lingo, that usually has to do with terminology such as “heart” and “faith.” The Reformed definition of faith is that it only has reality in the object of it. Therefore, if we have “faith” in Christ, the reality of our faith only has substance in Christ who is outside of us (the first paradigm), or within our still spiritually dead bodies (the second paradigm). This is known as the “eye of faith” because faith can only see outward and only serves a purpose in regard to what it is seeing. [10] What it is seeing is experienced in the heart. The “heart,” especially in Neo-Calvinist doctrine, is where manifestations of faith are experienced. When we experience the works of Christ, the heart is where we experience such. [11]

So all in all, meditation on Christ enables us to experience the works of Christ imputed to our realm. This supposedly makes sanctification by faith alone feasible. That’s the crux: *let go and let God* in order to keep your salvation. This is critical to their gospel because sanctification finishes justification. The vast majority of Christians in America claim this doctrine outright or function like it albeit unwittingly.

The fourth model is the perspective we will be using as we move forward in our Study of Romans. We are not only righteous positionally, we are in fact righteous people because of the new birth. We are literally new creatures. [12] We are righteous, we are able, and we are helped by the full power of the Trinity in our Christian lives. [13] There are many texts we could look at, but let’s focus on Romans 15:13,14:

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.14 I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

In verse 14, whether “you, yourselves” as a way to make it in addition to the Trinity’s work, or the word for “yourself, (g0846. ἀνδρός αὐτος), it is the idea of *in addition to*. Therefore, no surprise that the KJV states it this way:

14 And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also [underline added] to admonish one another.

The word for “admonish” is expressed better in the Amplified Bible:

14 Personally I am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are rich in goodness, amply filled with all [spiritual] knowledge and competent to admonish and counsel and instruct one another also.

Because of the new birth, we are full of goodness and able *in and of* ourselves. This is a critical distinction—we are responsible for implementing the spiritual gifts that have been given us. Not only that, it is a matter of wisdom to excel in regard to the natural order of things as created by God. This is not pragmatism, it’s wisdom.

Let’s look at a definition of sanctification, and its relationship to the practical.

## **Sanctification**

The Bible has much to say about justification by faith alone, but where is this standalone subject of sanctification that is a different matter of Christian living altogether? One place among many would be 1 Thessalonians 4:3ff:

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;

Obviously, sanctification is all about KNOWING HOW to control our bodies. And even more obvious is the fact that justification has nothing to do with that at all. The discipleship goal of Christians is to know more about controlling their bodies today than they did yesterday? And does that effect how the world sees us, and God? We believe the answer to that question is a resounding, “yes!” (Matthew 5: 13-16).

## **Fusion and Dichotomy**

Sanctification is a continued endeavor to learn more and more about how to control our bodies from the Scriptures. Unfortunately, anthropological concepts; i.e., what makes people tick, are deemed pragmatic and unspiritual. Rather than seeing these subjects as wisdom where Christians ought to be outdoing the world, they are rejected as “living by lists” and “living by do’s and don’ts.” I like what one pastor had to say about those truisms:

They are telling us the following: "Don't live by do's and Don'ts."

A prime example is something that everyone is born with: a conscience. The only Psychiatrist in history that really had a track record of helping people was O. Hobart Mowrer. The main thrust of his therapy was an emphasis on keeping a clear conscience. He believed that most mental illness was caused by a guilty conscience. He cured people by insisting that they deal with unresolved issues of guilt. Mowrer, once the President of the APA along with a long list of distinguished awards and appointments, wrote *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*. The book rejected the medical model of Psychology and criticized Christianity for relegating the care of the “mentally ill” to Freudian Psychology. Mowrer was not a Christian.

Nevertheless, he is the one who most inspired the father of the contemporary biblical counseling movement, Dr. Jay E. Adams, who applied Mowrer’s practical approach to biblical counseling. Adams

did this because he observed Mowrer's astounding results while doing an internship with him in the summer of 1965. [14]

This only makes sense. The apostle Paul instructed Christians to "keep a clear conscience before God." [15] The Bible has much to say about the subject of conscience. Christians should use the Bible to be wiser in all areas of human practicality and should excel at it far beyond those who live in the world; areas such as, planning, accountability, [16] etc. Unfortunately, these biblical subjects are dichotomized from the "spiritual" and deemed pragmatic.

At the same time, justification and sanctification are fused together in an effort to live out a Sabbatical sanctification; i.e., sanctification by faith alone. This is nothing new; James rejected the concept in his epistle to the 12 tribes of Israel that made up the apostolic church. It is also a Gnostic concept that sees the material as evil and only the spiritual as good. Therefore, since anthropology is part of the material realm, any practicality thereof cannot benefit the spiritual. Supposedly.

Another concept, along with conscience, is that of habituation. Through discipline, habit patterns can be formed that lead to change, ask anyone who has been in the military. People who enter the military come out as changed people. Because of our Protestant heritage and conditioning, these concepts seem grotesquely pragmatic. But according to the Bible, we are to make use of them. The Bible speaks specifically of those who get out of the habit of going to church. The ESV has this translation correct:

Hebrews 10:24 - And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Sanctification is a many-faceted collaborating with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit's power is unleashed through wisdom and obedience (James 1:25). We must know assuredly that justification is a finished work, and absolutely nothing that we do in sanctification can affect it for better or worse. This is what purifies our motives in our love for Christ in sanctification. "If you love me, keep my commandments" has absolutely nothing to do with our justification. It's for love only, not a working for justification. We are thankful for our justification, but that thankfulness doesn't save us or keep us saved. Only Christ saves—the new creature now loves Christ because that's who he/she is. Christ's love made it possible for us to love Him in sanctification, but nothing in sanctification keeps us saved. Sanctification looks not for a "final justification," but readies itself for the Master's return and longs to hear the words, "Well done faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23).

When I was a young boy, I often lived with my grandparents during the summer. My grandfather was a real-life John Wayne type. He worked as a construction foreman for a large company. And he was my hero. Before he left for work in the morning, I would sheepishly await for him to depart before beginning a flurry of tasks around their small farm. I would always have the tasks done well before his arrival home and waited at the end of the drive to hear his truck's humming wheels come down State Route 125. I would then take him around the property and show him the finished tasks. His smile and compliments were my reward. These are tasks that I didn't have to do; our love for each other was always something totally different from those tasks. I knew assuredly that he would love me whether I did those tasks or not because I was his grandson—his pride and joy. Some idea that the withholding of serving him in order to elevate the reality of his love for me would have been a ridiculous notion.

Justification and sanctification must be separate. Anthropology and the spiritual must be fused. Our bodies must be controlled and set apart for good works. This will lead to the showing forth of our good works and the glorification of the Father leading to salvation for others, not sheep redistribution.

## Two Natures

I have come to believe that Christians do NOT have two natures. We have one nature, the new one, the old nature is dead. The old us and its bondage to sin died with Christ, and we have been raised with Christ to new creaturehood. This is what baptism pictures. I believe sin dwells in our mortality or what the Bible calls “the flesh.” The “sin nature” is gone, and spoken of in the past tense:

Ephesians 2:1 - And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—

Galatians 4:8 - Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

2Peter 1:3 - His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

The word “partaker” means:

g2844. ἑιέιυίόò koinōnòs; from 2839; a sharer, i. e. associate:— companion, fellowship, partaker, partner.

Our service to God is a mirror of our new creaturehood. Our salvation is settled by faith alone, and is a finished work. We have received all of the blessings and power of heaven including the new birth. The declaration of our justification saved us, but we are not only righteous positionally, we have possession of personal righteousness. We are righteous:

1 John 3:4 - Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

## Endnotes

1. *Book of Concord*: The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord; III. The Righteousness of Faith, ¶39.
2. John King: *The Complete Bible Commentary Collection of John Calvin*; Genesis, Ch.2 sec.3, Ch.17 sec.13. Ibid: The Harmony of the Law, Due. 5:12-15, sec. 15).
3. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*. The Calvin Translation Society 1855. Editor: John Owen, p. 165 ¶4.
4. *Book of Concord*: The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord; III. The Righteousness of Faith, ¶9.
5. Ellen White: *Royalty and Ruin*; p. 28.
6. Paul David Tripp: *How People Change*; Punch Press 2006, p. 28.
7. *The Book of Concord*: Preface to the Emperor Charles V.; Article VI: Of New Obedience ¶1.
8. Paul Washer: *The Gospel Call and True Conversion*; Part 1, Chapter 1, heading – *The Essential Characteristics Of Genuine Repentance*, subheading – *Continuing and Deepening Work of Repentance*.
9. JC Ryle: *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*; Introduction, theses 7.
10. *The Australian Forum* Reformed resurgence project 1970: Present Truth Magazine vol. 36—article 3
11. Paul M. Dohse: *Pictures of Calvinism*; TANC Publishing 2013, pp. 27-36 [The correlation between manifestations and such being experienced in the heart is explained. The heart is not the seat of a changed character, but only where we experience life].

12. 2Corinthians 5:17

13. John 14:15 - "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper,[f] to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

14. Jay E. Adams: *Competent To Counsel*; Zondervan 1970, Introduction.

15. Ro 2:14, 15, 9:1, Ac 23:1, 24:16, 2Co 1:12, 1Ti 1:5, 3:9, Heb 13:18, 1Pe 2:19, 3:16, 3:21.

16. 2Timothy 2:22

17.

