

Justification and Sanctification

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Justification and sanctification are elements of a divine process that qualifies us to live in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

D. Todd Christofferson, “Justification and Sanctification,” *Ensign*, June 2001, 18 Justification and sanctification are at the center of God’s gracious plan of salvation and are the essence of our witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. While justification and sanctification may be viewed as distinct topics, in reality I believe they are elements of a single divine process that qualifies us to live in the presence of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

I have organized my discussion of this doctrine into three sections based upon statements from “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles.”

1. “As we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago, we offer our testimony of the reality of His matchless life and the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice.”
2. “He gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth.”
3. “He will rule as King of Kings and reign as Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bend and every tongue shall speak in worship before Him. Each of us will stand to be judged of Him according to our works and the desires of our hearts” (*Ensign*, Apr. 2000, 2-3; emphasis added).

“The Infinite Virtue of His Great Atoning Sacrifice”

Justification and sanctification are the fruit of the Atonement’s “infinite virtue,” which virtue we also refer to as mercy or grace. A verse in the Book of Mormon lays a helpful foundation: “And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away” (2 Ne. 2:13).



Lehi taught: "If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin.
If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness" (2 Ne. 2:13).

Lehi here remarks on the foundational nature of law, the divine law that governs in the universe. Elsewhere in the scriptures, as in Alma 42 for example, the word justice is used with similar meaning. So justice, or law, is something of a platform that sustains certain other fundamentals.

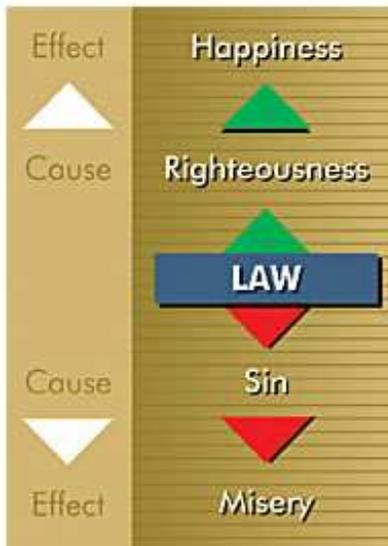
Lehi states that if there were no law, there would be no sin: "If ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin." Why cannot sin exist if law does not exist? What is sin? Quite simply it is disobedience to law. Obviously, where there is nothing to obey or disobey, there cannot be disobedience.

Lehi continues, "If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness." Again the question, why? What is righteousness but obedience?

Just as law must exist for sin or disobedience to be possible, so law must exist to give rise to the possibility of obedience or righteousness.

Lehi next observes, "If there be no righteousness there be no happiness." One may ask why. To me the answer is clear: happiness is the product of righteousness. It is a question of cause and effect. Happiness, the effect or result, can exist only when its necessary cause, righteousness, is first present.

Completing the symmetry, Lehi adds, "If there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery." Why so? Again, it is a matter of cause and effect: misery is the consequence of sin, its natural result.



Righteousness leads to happiness, and sin leads to misery.

Without any of these things and the necessary predicate or foundation of law, Lehi concludes, there could be no God, no earth, no mankind, “for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon.” Without law, one could not predict or control outcomes of actions. Without awareness of cause and effect, there would really be no such thing as choice. Existence would simply be chaos, the action of random forces. God could not work His will, and if we existed at all, we would lack the means to be actors; we would only be “acted upon.”

Fortunately, reality is otherwise. Lehi affirms, “There is a God, and he hath created all things, both the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are, both things to act and things to be acted upon” (2 Ne. 2:14).

Nevertheless, we still face a dilemma. Lehi states it earlier in this same chapter: “And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Ne. 2:5).

With nothing more, by virtue of the Fall and our own disobedience, the law condemns us to temporal and spiritual death. Law, or justice, is not a pleasant concept when one is condemned by it and “miserable forever.” Worldly philosophies attempt to resolve this misery and guilt by endeavoring to erase divine law or define it out of existence. As we have already observed, if we could get rid of the law, there would be no such thing as sin and thus no misery. With Corianton, there are many today who “try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery” (Alma 42:1). This approach, however, if it could succeed, would also eliminate our potential for happiness. We need to preserve justice for our own sakes, for our own potential happiness.

There is a better way. That better way is not to deny the law, but to come out from under its condemnation. The righteous are supported by law, a pleasant position to be in. But to achieve that status, we need more than the law alone. We need a Savior. We need a Mediator.

Again, Lehi:

“Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.

“Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Ne. 2:6-7).

Because of “the infinite virtue of His great atoning sacrifice,” Jesus Christ can satisfy or “answer the ends of the law” on our behalf. Pardon comes by the grace of Him who has satisfied the demands of justice by His own suffering, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). He removes our condemnation without removing the law. We are pardoned and placed in a condition of righteousness with Him. We become, like Him, without sin. We are sustained and protected by the law, by justice. We are, in a word, justified.

Thus, we may appropriately speak of one who is justified as pardoned, without sin, or guiltless. For example, “Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world” (3 Ne. 27:16; emphasis added). Yet glorious as the remission of sins is, the Atonement accomplishes even more. That “more” is expressed by Moroni:

“And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moro. 10:33; emphasis added).

To be sanctified through the blood of Christ is to become clean, pure, and holy. If justification removes the punishment for past sin, then sanctification removes the stain or effects of sin. The Prophet Joseph Smith testified:

“And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—

“That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear [justify] the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness” (D&C 76:40-41).

Speaking of certain priesthood brethren in ancient times, Alma said:

“Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.

“Now, they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there

were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God” (Alma 13:11-12).

We may appropriately speak of sanctification as the baptism of the Spirit, or being “baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost” (Moses 6:66).

“And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

“Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:19-20; emphasis added).

It will seem a natural thing for those who have been sanctified to enter into the rest or kingdom of God, for they will have become like Him (see 1 Jn. 3:2; Moro. 7:48). As the Lord said to Adam after he had been baptized by water and by the Spirit, “Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons” (Moses 6:68).

“His Was a Great Vicarious Gift”

This marvelous pardon that relieves us of the punishment that justice would otherwise exact for disobedience and the purifying sanctification that follows are best described as gifts, or the gift of grace. “His was a great vicarious gift in behalf of all who would ever live upon the earth” (“The Living Christ,” 2). Given the magnitude of the gift of grace, we would never suppose, even with all the good we could possibly do in this life, that we had earned it. It is just too great. “We know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do,” says Nephi (2 Ne. 25:23). It is, and will always be, in truth, the gift of God through His divine Son.

But, as Nephi implies, there is something we can do, something that all who are accountable must do. To have effect, the gift must be accepted: “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33).

Thus, it is not that we earn these gifts, but rather that we choose to seek and accept justification and sanctification. Since the Savior paid for our sins and satisfied justice for us, we become debtors to Him rather than to justice. We must therefore meet the stipulations He has established for forgiveness and cleansing. Otherwise, He withdraws His proffered mediation, and we are left to deal alone with the demands of justice, lacking the means to become pure. One must choose Christ to receive what Christ offers.

How does one choose Christ? We noted earlier Lehi’s declaration that it requires “a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (2 Ne. 2:7). Nephi elaborates: “Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye

should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17).

I repeat the Savior’s succinct declaration in 3 Nephi: “Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day” (3 Ne. 27:20).

Referring to the diagram on page 24, we see that the gift of grace or mercy is received as a believer repents, enters into the specified covenants, and receives the Holy Ghost. This action of acceptance on our part opens the door for the process of justification (remission, or pardoning, of sins) and sanctification (cleansing from sin) to work in us—something we may refer to as being born again:

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

“Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5).

This rebirth was described more fully to Adam as recorded in the book of Moses. God taught Adam that it was necessary for men to repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. Adam, seeking deeper understanding, asked why (see Moses 6:50-53). God explained that man must be clean in order to dwell in His presence and that this requires a cleansing birth into the kingdom of God:

“By reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory;

“For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified” (Moses 6:59-60).

We see here the elements that bring about our second birth or entry into the kingdom of God analogized to the elements that accompany our birth into mortality (water, blood, and spirit). This birth from mortal life into eternal life requires the interaction of (1) covenants (symbolized by water, the principal feature of our first covenant: baptism), (2) the grace of Christ (symbolized by His blood), and (3) the Holy Spirit, the medium through whom atoning grace is applied to remit sins and sanctify souls.

Justification and sanctification are accomplished by the grace of Christ, which grace is a gift to man based on faith. But our moral agency is also a necessary element in this divine process. We must will to repent and act to repent. We must elect to be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost, and we must elect to remain loyal to our covenants thereafter. To receive the gift we must act in the manner He has ordained.

“Each of Us Will Stand to Be Judged”

It is clear that our acceptance of the gift of grace is not a single act occurring at a single moment in time, but is instead an ongoing process and obligation. The words of the Savior in 3 Nephi that we have already referred to make this point:

“Whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled [with the Holy Ghost]; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world.

“And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, ...

“And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end” (3 Ne. 27:16-17, 19; emphasis added).

We are warned:

“There is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God;

“Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation;

“Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also” (D&C 20:32-34).

In due course, Jesus Christ will judge the world, both those who have rejected His grace and those who have accepted His mercy:

“There is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

“But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored to his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

“For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:22-24).

To be classed among the truly penitent, random acts of obedience will not be adequate. We must properly enter into the covenants and persist in keeping them to the point that our expectation of salvation is affirmed by the Holy Spirit of Promise (see D&C 132:7, 19). It is not simply the promise of obedience in our contracts with Deity that brings grace, but the performance of our promises: “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Rom. 2:13).



The gift of grace or mercy is received as a believer repents, enters into the specified covenants, and receives the Holy Ghost.

None of us, of course, is perfectly obedient, and thus we rely on our baptismal covenant to bring a remission of sins after baptism just as it has done for our lives before baptism. We rely on repentance to reinvigorate that covenant, to bring the Holy Spirit and, with it, atoning grace. The process of cleansing and sanctifying through the baptisms of water and of the Holy Ghost can be continued weekly as we worthily partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The tokens of the Atonement, the bread and water, become symbolic cleansing agents and the sign of our renewed covenant, similar to the symbolism of the water in which we were immersed at baptism. It is as if we were being baptized afresh and the door once again opened for the Holy Spirit to enter, “that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]” (D&C 20:77). Thus, we need not fear judgment. Having our sins remitted or pardoned and our garments spotless through the blood of Christ, we can imagine we hear the voice of the Lord in the Day of Judgment saying, “Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth” (Alma 5:16).

This personal persistence in the path of obedience is something different than achieving perfection in mortality. Perfection is not, as some suppose, a prerequisite for justification and

sanctification. It is just the opposite: justification (being pardoned) and sanctification (being purified) are the prerequisites for perfection. We only become perfect “in Christ” (see Moro. 10:32), not independently of Him. Thus, what is required of us in order to obtain mercy in the day of judgment is simple diligence. As the Prophet Joseph Smith counseled from the dank prison of Liberty, Missouri: “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed” (D&C 123:17; see also Mosiah 4:27).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915-85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles once expressed our obligation this way:

“Everyone in the Church who is on the straight and narrow path, who is striving and struggling and desiring to do what is right, though far from perfect in this life; if he passes out of this life while he’s on the straight and narrow, he’s going to go on to eternal reward in his Father’s kingdom.

“We don’t need to get a complex or get a feeling that you have to be perfect to be saved. ... The way it operates is this: you get on the path that’s named the ‘straight and narrow.’ You do it by entering the gate of repentance and baptism. The straight and narrow path leads from the gate of repentance and baptism, a very great distance, to a reward that’s called eternal life. ... Now is the time and the day of your salvation, so if you’re working zealously in this life—though you haven’t fully overcome the world and you haven’t done all you hoped you might do—you’re still going to be saved” (“The Probationary Test of Mortality,” Salt Lake Institute of Religion devotional, 10 Jan. 1982, 12).

When we stand before the Savior to be judged of Him, it will be “according to our works and the desires of our hearts” (“The Living Christ,” 3; see also D&C 137:9). Where we can act, where we have the capacity and the means, we must act if we are to retain a justified and sanctified status. But where we legitimately and truly cannot act, the Lord will accept the desire for the deed. An application of this principle can be found in King Benjamin’s statements about our obligations to the poor. To those with means and power to help, he counseled: “And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you—that is, for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God—I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants” (Mosiah 4:26).

To those who lack means to assist, he said: “And again, I say unto the poor, ye who have not and yet have sufficient, that ye remain from day to day; I mean all you who deny the beggar, because ye have not; I would that ye say in your hearts that: I give not because I have not, but if I had I would give.

“And now, if ye say this in your hearts ye remain guiltless” (Mosiah 4:24-25).

The Savior offers to all who will have faith and accept it, the gifts of being justified or pardoned before the law and also being sanctified—that is, being made spotless and holy. There is no other

name, nor way, nor means whereby such redemption may occur (see Mosiah 3:17; Moses 6:52). And truly His grace is sufficient to achieve it (see Moro. 10:32). So my witness to each member of the Church, and our witness to the world, is as recorded in the scripture of this last and greatest dispensation:

“And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true;

“And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:30-31).

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