

**Discussion with Dr. R. Scott Clark of Westminster Theological Seminary
and other Protestants**

on David's Justification in Romans 4:5-8

A *Bellarmino Theological Forum* patron alerted me to a discussion taking place on a Protestant blog regarding the topic of Justification. He said that one of the participants was Professor R. Scott Clark of Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) in Escondido, CA. As many BTF patrons know, I graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, so I am well familiar with the caliber of men that teach there and the approach they take toward theology.

The topic of the conversation was the radio interview I had about a year ago with another professor at WTS named Michael S. Horton. Professor Horton interviewed me on his radio program as I gave the Catholic understanding of Justification from my book *Not By Faith Alone* (Queenship Publishing, 1996). (Michael and I had previously debated this topic in front of a public audience of 1500 people in 1995). After the interview, I wrote an article describing my experience which is now on our website:

(<http://www.catholicintl.com/catholicissues/Interview%20of%20Robert%20Sungenis%20by%20Protestant%20Dr.pdf>).

Among the many things I said, I emphasized that I had mentioned the case of David's justification in Romans 4:5-8 three times during the interview as one of the most important scriptural supports for the Catholic doctrine of Justification, but I had also remarked that Dr. Horton never followed up with a discussion of David.

Apparently, some Protestants of the Calvinistic persuasion were a bit bothered by Horton's reluctance to take up the issue of David so they brought it up on the blog of Professor R. Scott Clark. The name of the blog is Heidelberg, named after the city of Heidelberg where some of the Calvinistic doctrines were forged. In the blog, Dr. Clark responds to some of their questions. I have copied the blog discussion and have made intermittent comments along the way.

For the Protestant participants, I have put "Interlocutor."

When Dr. Clark is speaking, I have put "R. Scott Clark."

When I am speaking, it is "R. Sungenis"

First, here is a brief bio on Dr. R. Scott Clark:



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The Discussion on David and His Justification

Interlocutor: The text says "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." It is by no means clear that this is a "mortal sin," or that he had "lost his justification." To be sure, David suffered consequences of this -- "the sword shall never depart from your house..."

R. Sungenis: This would be the typical way a Protestant would try to escape this problem, but it doesn't help. First, Protestants believe that any sin is worthy of eternal damnation, so it won't matter to them whether David's sin is venial or mortal. Second, adultery and murder, according to both Old and New Testaments, are very serious sins. St. Paul states that anyone who commits such sins cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (Gal 5:19-21). So it is not a matter of merely "displeasing" the Lord.

Interlocutor: but as for losing justification, this is more a case of what is further explained in Hebrews 12:

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,

nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

What Sungenis suggests is reading modern Roman Catholic doctrine back into Scripture, which is the Catholic way of doing Scriptural "exegesis":

http://www.vatican.va/holy_fathe...generis_en.html

R. Sungenis: This has nothing to do with reading "Roman Catholic exegesis" into Scripture. I could easily accuse Protestants of reading forensic imputation into Scripture, since Scripture never defines justification in that manner.

What the interlocutor needs to grapple with is that Paul is using David as an example of a man who was in sin and who could do no work in order to extricate himself from that position. David fits the description Paul is seeking because David was convicted of committing the sins of adultery and murder, two capital sins of the Old Testament that under normal circumstances would require death. David is freed from the eternal consequences of these sins because he repents. Paul is thus using this incident as an example of someone becoming "justified." So, however we want to construe or misconstrue David's sin, the fact is that his repentance brought him justification.

Now, either David was not a justified man prior to the justification Paul says he acquired in Romans 4:5-8, or he was justified. If he wasn't justified, then David was living his life as a godless man pretending to be a godly man, and all his famous exploits of holding forth the name of Yahweh for Israel amounted to nothing. He was still unjustified. Of course, that position makes no sense at all.

So the only choice left is that David was a justified man before he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, and that is the very reason that Paul can use him as an example of a man who attains Justification. It is really very simple, and I have yet to see any Protestant, going on 13 years now since *Not By Faith Alone* has been published, mount a cogent argument against it.

Interlocutor: theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation: for it belongs to them to point out how the doctrine of the living Teaching Authority is to be found either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures and in Tradition. Besides, each source of divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth, that they can really never be exhausted; Hence it is that theology through the study of its sacred sources remains ever fresh...

This means, "we can make Scriptures say whatever we want (need) them to say."

on the other hand, speculation which neglects a deeper search into the deposit of faith, proves sterile, as we know from experience.

And of course this is what exegesis does-- it reads what the text says, but goes no further. And this type of hermeneutic does prove "sterile" when it comes to finding Catholic doctrines.

John Bugay | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 4:35 am | #

R. Sungenis: The refusal to see the logic of what I presented above concerning David is what I would call a "neglect to do a deeper search" into the Scripture, which results in resting on the "sterile" theology that forbids the Protestant to see Romans 4:5-8 as Paul is using it – David is an example of someone who was justified when he repented of his sin, even though he had been justified previously.

Interlocutor: More of that Humani Generis citation -- which is important because it articulates the ground rules about how Catholics read Scriptures:

But for this reason even positive theology cannot be on a par with merely historical science. For, together with the sources of positive theology God has given to His Church a living Teaching Authority to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith only obscurely and implicitly. This deposit of faith our Divine Redeemer has given for authentic interpretation not to each of the faithful, not even to theologians, but only to the Teaching Authority of the Church. But if the Church does exercise this function of teaching, as she often has through the centuries, either in the ordinary or in the extraordinary way, it is clear how false is a procedure which would attempt to explain what is clear by means of what is obscure. Indeed, the very opposite procedure must be used. Hence Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Pius IX, teaching that the most noble office of theology is to show how a doctrine defined by the Church is contained in the sources of revelation, added these words, and with very good reason: "in that sense in which it has been defined by the Church."

Sungenis's explanation then is an attempt to "show how a doctrine defined by the Church" (in this case, "mortal sin" and "confession" and the losing and re-getting of one's justification) might be "contained in the Scripture."

Rome says it is "the servant of Scripture," but here is a clear case when its deeds show it to hold itself as the master of Scripture.

John Bugay | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 4:39 am | #

As for a genuine exegetical reading of that text, in context, Carson and Beale: ("Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament")

It is, moreover, the theme of "blessing," with its concrete outworkings, with which Paul introduces the testimony of David. Paul understands Abraham's justification not as a bare declaration, but rather as the anticipatory enactment of the promise from which Abraham's faith arose. Abraham's justification is

bound up concretely with God's promise to him and cannot rightly be abstracted from it. God's reckoning of Abraham as righteous is God's recognition of Abraham's answer to the promise of seed. The reality of that seed is already present for Abraham in the faith that the promise of God has created in him, as Paul will go on to explain (4:17) ...

In appealing to David, Paul follows Ps. 31:1-2 without variation. With the LXX, Paul differs from the Hebrew [Masoretic text] in shifting the singular forms in the first verse to a plural. The singular usage of the Hebrew psalm is paradigmatic in any case, and the psalm itself shifts to a plural in its final verse. The introduction of the plural into the first verse of the citation therefore makes the universality of the psalm explicit and invites the readers to find themselves in the experience of David. In contrast with many of the rabbinic references to Ps. 32, Paul makes no mention of the confession of sins, which is a central theme of the psalm. Confession is implicitly taken up in faith for Paul, in which sin that has overpowered our person is overcome. In faith we "give glory to God." As was the case with the story of Abraham, the broader context of the psalm makes clear that the "reckoning of righteousness" is no mere declaration, but rather an effective word. In the psalm the forgiveness of sins brings healing to both body and mind, deliverance in times of distress, and the guidance and loving care of the Lord. Consequently, according to the apostle, the "reckoning of righteousness" is a blessing that (re) creates life. It is the forgiveness of sins, which effects all the benefits that Psalm 32 describes. (623-624)

It was the "effect" of the "godly discipline" as I outlined from Hebrews, above.

R. Sungenis: The interlocutor has not said a word about David being an example of someone who receives justification. David as an example of justification is the very heart of Paul's argument, since he already used Abraham in the previous four verses as the first example of someone who was justified. As I have found in every Protestant exegesis dealing with Romans 4:5-8, David's justification from sin is totally ignored and spun into some story about "godly discipline," or whether the subject is singular or plural, things that are irrelevant to Paul's major point about David becoming justified from his sin, the same as Abraham was justified.

Interlocutor: Bryan wants to talk about how "the Church understands Scripture," that is, how it gives a new "in-house" meaning to things. Paul here shows how he (and through him, "the Church" understood an OT scripture. Paul himself gives a clear explication of what that Psalm meant.

So what Bryan is saying is that "the Church" wants to go even further and change the meaning of what Paul said. After all, Paul's "in-house" meaning proves "sterile" when it comes to getting a Catholic interpretation out of the Scriptures; hence the "inexhaustibility" of the Scriptures that Pius spoke about.

John Bugay | 01.28.09 - 5:02 am | #

R. Sungenis: No, it's not the Catholic Church that is changing the meaning. Paul's context is justification, and how justification is procured by man. Abraham and David are his examples. Justification is not procured from works of debt, as if God owes man something, but from faith (Abraham) and repentance (David). THAT certainly isn't a "sterile" message, but the very heart of the Gospel.

Interlocutor: I remember hearing Sungenis make this same case elsewhere. It made me wonder if Catholic scholars typically use this text to prove the RCC dogma on justification. Any ideas anyone? It seems to me that Sungenis has picked a text that was never intended to be used for the purposes he utilizes it for. Whether we come from a Catholic or Protestant understanding of justification, we need to see that there are texts which speak directly to the issue and those where the issue is just not a matter under consideration. Why go to a passage that is not directly addressing justification where there are no shortage of texts that do?

R. Sungenis: I appear to be the first Catholic scholar to use this particular argument from David's case in Romans 4:5-8, nevertheless, it has been well received by the Catholic scholars to whom I have introduced it. But that is beside the point. The claim of Bugay that Romans 4:5-8 wasn't intended to teach the nature or implementation of justification simply ignores the context. David fell into sin. He could not work to extricate himself from it. The only remedy was repentance. Paul calls that a "justification" experience. If Abraham was justified for his faith without work in the previous verses, why is David not an example of justification for his faith and repentance without work? Yes, there are other passages that speak about justification, but what passage has been used more often in Christian history to teach the nature of justification than Romans 3-4?

Interlocutor: The text in Samuel is not discussing the sinner's relationship to God. And why is Sungenis using Samuel as a referent text for Psalm 32?

Andrew McCallum | 01.28.09 - 6:36 am | #

R. Sungenis: Samuel was cited because it shows David's godly life before he committed his heinous sins of adultery and murder. In other words, the citations from Samuel show that David was already a justified man, otherwise he could not have been a man "after God's own heart." The corollary point, then, is that David must have lost his justified state when he later committed adultery and murder, and therefore, Paul could use him as an example of someone who restores his justification upon repentance of this capital sins.

R. Scott Clark: Sungenis' appeal to the example/case of David and Paul's use of it has a hidden premise, an a priori: God can only say "justified" of those who are intrinsically, inherently just or completely sanctified. Obviously, after sinning, David was no longer intrinsically just or completely sanctified, ergo he must have lost his justification.

If the premise is false, the conclusion no longer follows.

The conclusion is manifestly false. David was never utterly sanctified or intrinsically, inherently, just (*iustitia propria*) at any point in his life, and therefore, on Sungenis' scheme, he was never justified. He had no justification to lose.

R. Sungenis: So let's understand what Dr. Clark is saying. He is claiming that I cannot appeal to Paul's use of David as an example of someone who had lost his justification and becomes re-justified upon his

repentance because “David was never utterly sanctified or intrinsically, inherently, just (iustitia propria) at any point in his life,” and therefore, “he had no justification to lose.”

Dr. Clark's argument is high on theological terminology but very low on logic. First, why would Paul even be referring to David in a context in which he hopes to teach the nature of justification if David was not justified at the very time in his life that Paul is describing when David sought God's forgiveness without doing works? If David did not receive justification from God when he repented of his sins of adultery and murder, wouldn't this destroy Paul's whole argument that one is justified when he exhibits faith and repentance without works?

Second, if David is not an example of someone who received justification for his repentance, would this not go against the grain of the rest of Paul's teaching in the New Testament that faith and repentance, without works, procure justification? David is exhibiting all the ingredients that Paul calls for when he describes what is necessary for justification (e.g., faith, repentance, no works, God's grace) yet Dr. Clark insists that Paul can't be describing justification. How so? Forgive the accusation, Dr. Clark, but this seems to be a classic case in which one's theological dogmatics overrules the plain reading of Scripture.

Third, if David did not become justified at this time, would not citing him in Romans 4:5-8 be inappropriate, since the citing of Abraham in the four previous verses was done precisely to show an example of someone who was justified by faith without works?

Fourth, if it is true that we, as Christians, are justified in the same way Abraham was justified (by faith without works), and the New Testament says that we are also justified by faith and repentance without works, then does it not make perfect sense that David is also being used as an example of a man who was justified by faith and repentance without works? Why are we and Abraham included in the justification but David is left out?

Fifth, how can one read the Old Testament accounts of David's very close walk with God prior to his sin of adultery and murder and come away concluding, as Dr. Clark has done, that David “had no justification to lose”? Are we to suppose that all the faithful prayers and good acts David did that he attributed to and gave to God's glory were done by a pagan still in the depths of damnable sin, yet Abraham, who believed and lived the same faith as David was justified? How could David be unjustified and Abraham be justified when they both had the same life toward God? How could Abraham be called “the friend of God” (Jm 2:23) and be justified, yet David be called “a man after God's own heart” (Ac 13:22; 1Sm 13:14) and be unjustified?

Dr. Clark's proposal simply doesn't make sense.

R. Scott Clark: Or, we can say with God's Word that the basis for our justification is extrinsic, that it is Jesus' inherent, intrinsic righteousness and that perfect, sinless righteousness is imputed to sinners. It was on this basis that David the sinner said:

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom Yahweh does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no guile."
(Ps 32:1-2).

For David, the ground of his acceptance with God was not his intrinsic sanctity or righteousness but the imputation of some one else's righteousness. David understood that there had to be perfect righteousness. He understood the implicit message of the entire sacrificial system. Unlike Rome (and Sungenis) he did not teach a doctrine of congruent merit, that God accepts our best efforts and imputes perfection to them. David understood the need for a perfect righteousness. He understood what Paul taught in Rom 4:

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not impute his sin.' ...We say that faith was imputed to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it imputed to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised."

The entire point of Paul's argument is that the ground of David's righteousness and the ground of Abraham's righteousness (and that of all sinners) is not their intrinsic righteousness or sanctity. It is not the godly who God justifies, it is the ungodly.

That is why Paul says that it is not the who who "works" but the one who "trusts" whom God justifies. The instrument of our justification is not circumcision or faith made a reality by sanctification but only "trust" or "confidence" (the very thing that Trent has condemned) in Christ and in his finish

R. Scott Clark | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 8:22 am | #

R. Sungenis: All this argumentation is superfluous. Catholic doctrine agrees that it is not because of works that we are justified. The first canon of the Council of Trent clearly says so:

"If anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done either by his own natural powers, or through the teaching of the Law, and without divine grace through Christ Jesus: let him be anathema."

Dr. Clark is doing what most theologians do when they confront the issue of David in Romans 4 – they try to cover over the clear meaning of the text with highfalutin theological language. But all this does is 'read into' the text what Dr. Clark wants to see. Dr. Clark wants to see David taking on the role of a theologian describing what takes place for everyone else who is justified, but Dr. Clark does not want David to be the very example of his own theology. But ask yourself honestly: does that position make any sense? The very reason David can be a theologian on justification is because he was the very person who experienced the theology first hand, when God forgave him of his heinous sins and restored his

previous spiritual life. How could David possibly be a theologian on justification if the very theology he is espousing doesn't apply to him?!

Interlocutor: Very weak. Paul is referencing David's word as a confirmation of the blessedness of the forgiveness of sins. David received this blessedness throughout his life, not just after the adultery and murder. Why does Sungenis think David participated in all the ceremonies and rituals that God prescribed to the Israelites for the forgiveness of sins? Does He think each time the Israelites are forgiven of any sins they are re-justified? So Paul is not making the argument that David received justification at that point, but instead using David's word as a confirmation of the blessing the justified one receives and this forgiveness of sin is continual and lifelong.

R. Sungenis: This makes no sense. If David's sins were forgiven and he received a "blessedness" from God for that act of repentance, how is it that when we do the same kind of repentance we also receive the same "blessedness," but yet we become justified but David doesn't? How is that possible? I can safely tell you this, since I was a Protestant for 18 years – it is only possible when you want to cling to your Protestant theology so much that you are willing to ignore the plain reading of the text in front of your face.

If in the opening verses of Romans 4 Paul uses Abraham as an example of someone who received justification by faith not works, then why would he not use David as another shining example of justification by faith and not works? I'm afraid that the Protestant is forced to argue the way he does because he knows how devastating David is to Protestant theology. Dr. Eric Svendsen tried to use a similar argument with me a few years ago. He claimed that Paul used Abraham as an example of justification but wasn't using David as an example. He claimed that David was speaking about how the rest of us would become justified but not himself. Again, this is a classic example of how blinded we can become to the plain reading of the text when we let our theology be the grid through which the Scripture must pass.

Interlocutor: If this is the strongest argument against definitive justification then it shows how weak the Catholic doctrine is. Sungenis should keep reading Romans and in chapter 8 he should see that Paul is making no such argument when he says the following:

30And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[m] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If Paul clearly and unequivocally says nothing shall separate us from the love of God one wonders why Sungenis thinks some cobbled together conjectures are stronger than this?

Ronnie | 01.28.09 - 8:32 am | #

R. Sungenis: Because Romans 8:30-38 mentions nothing about adultery and murder. It is only the external things of life that do not have the power to separate us from God, not the internal condition of our soul. In Romans 8:30-38 Paul mentions only external things, not sin. Galatians 5:19-21 is clear that sin is what will separate us from God, and it is sin that is the context of Paul's remarks about David in Romans 4:5-8.

Interlocutor: John, So what Bryan is saying is that "the Church" wants to go even further and change the meaning of what Paul said.

No. You have misunderstood me if that is what you think I was saying.

In fact, your continued misinterpretations/misrepresentations of what I have written, and of the Catholic Church's own documents, show precisely why it was necessary that Christ provided the Church with a perpetual magisterium, and how such a magisterium, by elucidating the authoritative interpretation of Scripture, is its servant.

You seem to think that God cannot lovingly discipline a person in a state of mortal sin. But if Christ, in His mercy, while we were yet sinners, died for us, then even when we are in a state of post-baptismal mortal sin (a "sin unto death" 1 John 5), He may discipline us to bring us back to repentance.

In the peace of Christ,

Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 8:44 am | #

Well at least the lines are delineated clearly again; intrinsic, organic righteousness over against an imputed alien one as it regards justification.

sean | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 9:08 am | #

Bryan -- there is no meaning, and I am referring to this line of discussion:

<http://www.haloscan.com/comments...49237126/#78841>

Only after leaving seminary did I start to realize that a major assumption of Protestant exegesis is that the early Church used all these terms in just the same way as did the Hebrews/Greeks. That's the rationalist [and deistic] philosophical assumption built into lexicons like BAGD. Catholics don't turn to pagans and Jews to find out what we meant when we used these terms. We're the ones who used them. We turn to the Church who used them.

So here I am, giving an example of Paul using terms (and I cite Carson/Beale to show precisely "how" "the Church," represented by Paul, "uses these terms."

What is missing is the sense that Sungenis is talking about. There is no presumption of "mortal sin" (in contrast to just "sin").

R. Sungenis: It really makes no difference whether you call it mortal sin or not. I only used the term "mortal sin" because the Catholic Church regards adultery and murder as sins which will incur the Second Death. The Catholic Church also teaches that if one commits adultery or murder he loses his justification. That theology fits like a glove into David's case in Romans 4:5-8, since it is obvious that David was already a justified man before he committed adultery and murder. Hence, he had to lose his justified status when he committed adultery and murder, and therefore Paul could then refer to him as an "ungodly man" in Romans 4:5. Since "ungodly men" need to be justified, David was a prime candidate. All he had to do was repent of his sin, not work, and God would forgive him and justify him. Since He did, then Paul can rightly use David as an example of how a man is justified. It can work no other way.

Interlocutor: You seem to think that God cannot lovingly discipline a person in a state of mortal sin. N/i>

Here you are mis-reading me. My post of the selection from Hebrews clearly does say that "God disciplines those he loves." But discipline does not involve "the loss of justification." (As if, by sinning, you can lose and regain eternal life again and again and again. The Catholic system embraces this yo-yo type of existence; the Reformed doctrines of perseverance and discipline -- per Hebrews above -- is a tremendous comfort to the believer.)

R. Sungenis: Discipline is not really an issue here. The discipline comes after David is justified. He loses his son. His wives are raped. His life really is not the same as it was previously. He was disciplined dearly for his sin. But the only point Paul is making in Romans 4:5-8 is David's eternal status with God. Will he be condemned eternally for his sins (Romans 6:23) or will be saved? He can only be saved if he becomes justified.

Interlocutor: Again, Sungenis, from the original post, has David "losing his justification."

As Andrew said, and as Carson/Beale expound, David's justification is not at issue.

Only Catholicism wants to make its own rules. This stems from "pride of ownership," as if it somehow owns and can manipulate what the Scriptures say and mean. We've been over this, over and over again.

John Bugay | 01.28.09 - 9:26 am | #

R. Sungenis: But Mr. Bugay has not shown us how David could not have been a justified man prior to his sin of adultery and murder. If David wasn't justified previously, then the whole account of David's life in the books of Samuel, including many of the Psalms he wrote, is an exercise in futility, for nothing the man did or prayed was ever worthy of acquiring his justification, yet these historical books tells us that even as a young lad David was chosen over his 7 brothers precisely because "God looks into the heart of the man, not on the outside." If David was an unjustified pagan, what was God looking at when he compared David to his immoral brothers? No, the only way it makes sense is to understand that David

was indeed a justified man, but lost his justification when he committed adultery and murder. He regained his justification when he repented of those sins, as Paul clearly teaches in Romans 4:5-8.

Interlocutor: By the way Bryan -- what is "mortal sin" if not that "sin unto death"?

It seems as if you have created a third category:

venial sin

mortal sin

"sin unto death"

"Grave sin" IS "mortal sin." That's why it's "mortal". Or are you changing the meaning of THAT one too?

John Bugay | 01.28.09 - 9:28 am | #

Conclusion: Since David was described as "a man after God's own heart" prior to this sinful episode, Paul's calling David's receiving of forgiveness "justification" demonstrates that, for the apostle, justification is not a one-time event that occurs at the beginning of the Christian life, but rather is a process that is repeated with each new occurrence of mortal sin and receiving of forgiveness.

This sure sounds like a case for "sinning so that grace may abound," which is ironic given that the Protestant program is supposed to be the antinomian one.

Zrim | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 10:04 am | #

If this is the strongest argument against definitive justification then it shows how weak the Catholic doctrine is.

Actually, I had never seen this argument before and can affirm that Catholic doctrine does not rest on any arguments from a debate between Robert Sungenis and Michael Horton.

I don't think scripture needs a stronger argument against sola fide than James 2.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 10:06 am | #

Here is a good resource which lays out much of the scriptural basis for the Catholic understanding of justification by the way.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 10:09 am | #

Dr. Clark,

Maybe you can help out in answering a question I have. Much is made in Reformed arguments against Rome that one of the reasons that Rome is wrong because Rome does not teach justification as a one time declarative act by God that once declared cannot be lost, as the discussion demonstrates. If a church does not teach justification as a once for all declarative act of God that cannot be lost is that church properly speaking a true church (I am thinking of the traditional reformed understanding of a true church, where the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered)?

tom | 01.28.09 - 10:10 am | #

John,

I agree that "Sin unto death" is mortal sin.

You wrote:

"Grave sin" IS "mortal sin." That's why it's "mortal". Or are you changing the meaning of THAT one too?

Grave sin is not necessarily mortal sin. There are three individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for committing a mortal sin, and the gravity ('grave-ness') of the sin is only one of them. (See CCC 1857).

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 10:31 am | #

Gee, there is "mortal sin" that really isn't "mortal" and really isn't "venial."

Why in the world did the nuns only relate these two kinds of sin?

(Of course, you are moving in the wrong direction, because all sin, the least sin, is infinitely offensive to God.)

John Bugay | 01.28.09 - 10:52 am | #

John,

Remember how I've been accused by you of mischaracterizing what you've said before? If I have done that I apologize and it was not my intent.

However, if you read Bryan's prior comment to you regarding mortal sin/grave sin you will see that the message is no way as you described it when you said, "Gee, there is "mortal sin" that really isn't "mortal" and really isn't "venial."

I appreciate you calling me to a higher standard when interacting with your arguments. I think its good advice and would ask that you try to do the same.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 11:17 am | #

So Sean,

Would you say that Sungenis' argument is poor?

sean | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 11:22 am | #

sean,

Maybe as a stand alone argument it isn't very strong.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 12:09 pm | #

John,

As you know and am sure agree with there is a objective reality and subjective interaction with that reality. In the case of mortal sin, if someone committed a grave evil (i.e. mortal sin) like abortion, that person may not be guilty of mortal sin subjectively (only God knows). Why? Because for sin to be mortal, as Bryan referenced, one needs to be aware that the sin is mortal, that is to have awareness that the sin is mortal and one needs to have full consent of the will. You may view this as the Church equivocating and changing meanings but this is the teaching of the Church. One could commit an objective evil, but not be subjectively guilty of it (e.g. the mentally challenged). Again, we must remember only God.

tom | 01.28.09 - 12:29 pm | #

Sean,

Thanks for the response. It wasn't a trick question by the way. I don't labor under the delusion that debates won or lost win the day necessarily, but I do like to see the lines of demarcation at least clearly outlined and understood by both sides. I can't tell you how many hatchet jobs I've seen done by protestant apologists on Matt 16:18 for example.

sean | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 12:34 pm | #

All, I skipped down after reading about half the comments (though I'll read the rest in a sec), but I think some of you are misunderstanding Sungenis's point.

He is not saying that the basis of David's justification was his inner sanctity (though he may believe that, I don't know). His point, I think, is pretty narrow: If, in his defense of his doctrine of justification, Paul appeals to an event in David's life that clearly happened long after his initial conversion, then how can Protestants say that justification only refers to the initial moment of legal acquittal?

It's similar to the argument they make about Abraham: The NT always appeals to Gen. 15 to highlight Abraham's justification ("Abraam believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness"). But Heb. 11 makes it clear that the quintessential act of faith on Abraham's part was his leaving Ur in Gen. 12 (before he was "counted righteous" in ch. 15), and James says that Abraham was justified IN THE GEN. 15 SENSE "when" he sacrificed Isaac in ch. 22.

So the point is not so much what justification's basis is, but that it occurs, according to Rome, throughout the Christian's life, not just at the beginning.

JJS | 01.28.09 - 12:59 pm | #

Interlocutor: I don't know, I thought Clark's thought was right on. If I don't grant intrinsic/organic sanctity or righteousness as grounds for justification, Which in the context of Rom 4-"apart from works", I can't see how you get there, then Sungenis' conclusion /example never gets off the ground.

sean | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 1:40 pm | #

R. Sungenis: JJS has hit it on the button. We can't confuse the issue by getting into the theological basis for why David was justified (e.g., infusion of grace or forensic imputation) because Paul is dealing with only one simple issue, that a person is justified by faith and not works, and both Abraham and David are prime examples of that simple process. Although let me add that Catholicism teaches that justification, at least in the New Testament period, begins at a definite point in time, for Baptism is the initial means of justification. After Baptism, justification can be lost due to mortal sin (which goes hand-in-hand with why the New Testament has a constant warning to Christians not to fall from the faith by falling into grievous sin).

Interlocutor: Does Romans 4 say "apart from works" or apart from "works of the Law."

The context of Romans 4 is found in Romans 3..."20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

Then in Romans 4 he goes on to talk about circumcision "work of the law."

So, obviously, Catholic soteriology does not maintain that we are infused with Grace so that we can perform the works of the law. Romans 4 isn't even talking about works of faith, love and charity. However, James 2 IS talking about these works which is proven by the context and the examples James gives which aren't "circumcision."

Sean | 01.28.09 - 1:56 pm | #

Interlocutor: JJS, So the point is not so much what justification's basis is, but that it occurs, according to Rome, throughout the Christian's life, not just at the beginning.

If the point is that "justification is an ongoing process," and it is based upon these scriptural examples, why is only one example pointed to? Wouldn't there have to be multiple examples to make the point that it is an ongoing process? It seems to me that citing singular examples is what one does to make the point that something is a singular event.

R. Sungenis: Does it really make a difference how many examples Paul uses? One would be sufficient, but in the interest of the two-or-three witness formula (e.g., 2Cor 13:1), Paul uses two witnesses, Abraham and David, one outside the Mosaic law, and one in the Mosaic law. As JJS pointed out, the real import of Paul's two examples is that both of them show that justification, as the Council of Trent said, is an ongoing process, and that it can be lost and regained.

Interlocutor: Clearly, the presuppositions we each start with are inescapable. But it would seem that to begin with the idea that justification is a process we would need to see more than the sins of Bathsheba and Uriah, unless we are to believe that David never sinned after this.

Zrim | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 2:03 pm | #

R. Sungenis: How much more sin would we need to see, in addition to adultery and murder, both of which were capital sins in Israel, to know that David had sinned grievously and that these particular sins are, according to the Old and New Testament, ones that will condemn a soul to eternal perdition? Sin is sin. What we can glean from David's sin is that some time close to when he committed the sins, he repented of them. He was not, as it were, a hardened criminal who went down a path of destruction. Those kinds of people rarely repent. The fact that David's sinning was caught and stopped rather quickly is one reason he could come to his senses and repent.

Zrim,

The link I provided earlier gives more examples.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 2:05 pm | #

Sean,

Maybe I'm missing something. Rom.4 is talking about Abraham in a pre-mosaic economy context. In fact it's a big part of the point. So, I'm not understanding the distinction you're making as it regards works and works of the law in that context.

sean | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 2:12 pm | #

Sean: Sungenis's point is that some episode of sin --> repentance in David's life is cited as an example of justification, but it occurred long after his conversion. His inference from this is that justification cannot therefore be a one-time declarative act which means, again by inference, that David lost something by his sin that he regained after his repentance.

Sean, Sorry, but there is no mention of works "of the law" when it comes to David. This whole supposed distinction between works and works of the law, without which the whole Catholic system falls apart, is without warrant. Paul uses the terms interchangeably.

JJS | 01.28.09 - 2:33 pm | #

R. Sungenis: Catholicism does not teach that there is a crucial difference between "works of the law" and "works" or "law" when Paul is speaking about justification. As I quoted above from Canon 1 of the Council of Trent, any work a man does in which he tries to obligate God to give him salvation is anathema. That is why Paul says it is like a "debt" in Romans 4:4. There are, however, some Catholics who try to form a theology based on a distinction that "works of the law" refers to the ceremonial law as opposed to the moral law, but that is only in special contexts, and it is not the basic foundation of the Catholic teaching on justification.

Interlocutor: Zrim, If the point is that "justification is an ongoing process," and it is based upon these scriptural examples, why is only one example pointed to? Wouldn't there have to be multiple examples to make the point that it is an ongoing process? It seems to me that citing singular examples is what one does to make the point that something is a singular event.

Well, the Catholic would say that Paul's two paradigmatic examples (Abraham and David) prove their point. The fact that there aren't more examples is Paul's fault, not theirs.

Clearly, the presuppositions we each start with are inescapable. But it would seem that to begin with the idea that justification is a process we would need to see more than the sins of Bathsheba and Uriah, unless we are to believe that David never sinned after this.

I don't understand you here. They would say that when the NT says that David was justified after repenting before Nathan, and that Abraham was justified at least twice, both after his conversion, they've made their case.

Plus, I think you're being a bit too VanTilian with all your talk of presuppositions. It almost sounds like one could justify any belief by simply saying, "Well, that's my presupposition" rather than allowing his presuppositions to be challenged.

JJS | 01.28.09 - 2:39 pm | #

Jason,

but there is no mention of works "of the law" when it comes to David.

I am talking about Romans 4 and Romans 4 isn't talking about David either. My comment was really just interacting with Protestant sean's 01.28.09 - 1:40 pm comment.

Is Paul in Romans 4 talking about the things that Christ talks about on the sermon on the mount? Or is he talking about circumcision?

That is the question. And there is a difference.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 2:40 pm | #

Interesting though is that Sungenis criticizes my approach here

I think his point is that the distinction was not considered important to the bishops at Trent.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 2:45 pm | #

Sean,

Is Paul in Romans 4 talking about the things that Christ talks about on the sermon on the mount? Or is he talking about circumcision?

That is the question. And there is a difference.

Strictly speaking Paul is talking about neither.

The SOTM is a part of the law of Christ (a whole other topic) that is binding specifically on the new covenant people of God who are indwelt by the Spirit of the risen Christ.

I'll eventually post on this, but what Catholics and NPP folks fail to reckon with is the question, "WHY was circumcision insufficient to justify?" The answer is not that it was too racist or ethnically exclusive, but because ANY works done by fallen man are tainted with sin and cannot bring about our acceptance by God (whether they are ceremonial boundary markers or not).

Why else would Peter, in the context of a big circumcision debate, counsel against "placing a burden on the neck of the Gentiles that neither we nor our fathers could bear"?

Are you seriously willing to argue that the Judaizers considered circumcision and dietary restrictions an unbearable burden? If so (which you must do in order to maintain your position), we're reading two completely different New Testaments.

JJS | 01.28.09 - 2:46 pm | #

Jason,

I wouldn't say that abiding in love through Grace (and from Grace alone) which renders faith working through love is likened to the burden of the law which Peter repudiates in Acts. That is not a burden but freedom.

Apparently, on the other hand, working the 'law' was a burden that 'neither Peter nor his fathers could bear.'

But, I admit that I may be trailing off on a rabbit hole that I haven't given too much thought. Sungenis' point about Trent not relying on this at all makes me hesitant to back into this position too much.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 2:55 pm | #

JJS,

So, by inference, if it's lost via sin, it becomes NOT a justification of the ungodly.-Rom 4:5 I guess you can say it(infer it) but I can't make it agree with v.5

sean | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 3:01 pm | #

JJS,

The presuppositional talk is meant to try and explain how some come to the conclusions they have, not to "justify any belief without being challenged." And the answers you seem to provide on behalf of the Catholic clearly have them. I suppose my presuppositions want to know what the Catholic who argues this way makes of the Christocentric/anthropomorphic tensions. In other words, OK, I see how this might be an argument for ongoing justification since all we see are two men justifying themselves time and again, but how does Jesus fit into these narratives? Or isn't he supposed to?

Zrim | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 3:28 pm | #

Sean,

I wouldn't say that abiding in love through Grace (and from Grace alone) which renders faith working through love is likened to the burden of the law which Peter repudiates in Acts. That is not a burden but freedom.

I agree with you, actually. What Peter is doing there in Acts 15, which Paul does all the time, is extrapolating a narrow principle of works from the broader Mosaic economy. This principle is "do this

and live." His point is that the law, which promised blessings upon fulfillment of its demands, is a burden for both Jews (obviously) and Gentiles (since they, like Israel, are in Adam).

Apparently, on the other hand, working the 'law' was a burden that 'neither Peter nor his fathers could bear.'

Yes, but remember the context. Peter is speaking specifically about circumcision. It makes no sense to say that what you call "works of the law" (Jewish boundary markers) were an unbearable burden for the Jews. They kept them so meticulously that they even made up new ones to keep it interesting ("I fast twice a week," for example).

The way to make sense out of Peter's description of circumcision as an unbearable burden is to say that that ceremony, while not all that unbearable in itself (for an infant) is indeed unbearable when considered in the broader context of law. To submit to circumcision, Paul tells the Galatians, is to assume the burden for the whole law. And this highlights the real problem, namely, that human SIN is what gets in the way of our works contributing to God's favor upon us.

That's what Jesus is for.

JJS | 01.28.09 - 4:26 pm | #

sean,

So, by inference, if it's lost via sin, it becomes NOT a justification of the ungodly.-Rom 4:5 I guess you can say it(infer it) but I can't make it agree with v.5

Well, try adopting their nomenclature for a minute. Would you say that God forgives the ungodly? Of course - once they repent, God forgives them (and this happens throughout your life). The Catholic would just say that "justification" is similar to forgiveness in that way.

It's all about the terminology.

JJS | 01.28.09 - 4:32 pm | #

Zrim,

The presuppositional talk is meant to try and explain how some come to the conclusions they have, not to "justify any belief without being challenged." And the answers you seem to provide on behalf of the Catholic clearly have them.

But we must recognize the dialectical, hermeneutical spiral involved. Catholics would say that it's not simply the case that they see justification as a process because that's the presupposition they bring to the table (as you say), but that they believe that justification is a process because the NT teaches that it is a process.

That's what I meant in my comment to you: You seem to chalk everything up to a person's presuppositions without giving due consideration to their arguments for them.

I suppose my presuppositions want to know what the Catholic who argues this way makes of the Christocentric/anthropomorphic tensions. In other words, OK, I see how this might be an argument for ongoing justification since all we see are two men justifying themselves time and again, but how does Jesus fit into these narratives? Or isn't he supposed to?

OK, I'll bite. Rather than coming to the Scripture with an already-determined appropriate level of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in mind, why not just let the Bible tell you what something like "justification" means?

That aside, though, ask yourself this question (I do this to baptists all the time, asking them if their arguments against infant baptism don't also preclude infant circumcision): "If you exchange the word 'justification' for 'forgiveness' in the Catholic's argument, is the graciousness of the gospel undermined?" If not (and that's the right answer), then perhaps they're simply employing different terminology than we are.

JJS | 01.28.09 - 4:41 pm | #

He is not saying that the basis of David's justification was his inner sanctity (though he may believe that, I don't know). His point, I think, is pretty narrow: If, in his defense of his doctrine of justification, Paul appeals to an event in David's life that clearly happened long after his initial conversion, then how can Protestants say that justification only refers to the initial moment of legal acquittal?

But Paul is not appealing to David at this point to demonstrate when David was justified, he is only appealing to the truth of what David said about justification. That is God does not count our sins against us. David could have said this at any point in his life and Paul would have quoted him to prove the point about what is true of the justified person. Sungensis is reading into the passage that Paul is saying David was justified at this point.

R. Sungenis: No, I'm not reading into the passage, because the passage is about Justification, and Paul already used one example of someone who was justified, Abraham. The whole context of Romans 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 is about Justification. So how could I be 'reading into' the passage when I see David right smack in the middle of a long discussion on justification, especially when the passage Paul picks of David is not some lofty incident in which David is exhibiting power and prestige, but one in which David is in sackcloth and ashes crying out to God for mercy for his sins? Is not repentance from sin the very thing the New Testament teaches as the means to acquiring justification? Again, I'm afraid my Protestant brethren actually see how powerful David is for the Catholic position, and the only way to deal with it is to make an artificial dichotomy in the passage, claiming that David is talking about how everyone else in the world is justified by repenting from sin, but not David. Protestants are forced to say that David is just playing theologian in Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, even though he just committed adultery and murder. Not likely, gentlemen.

Interlocutor: It's similar to the argument they make about Abraham: The NT always appeals to Gen. 15 to highlight Abraham's justification ("Abraam believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness"). But Heb. 11 makes it clear that the quintessential act of faith on Abraham's part was his leaving Ur in Gen. 12 (before he was "counted righteous" in ch. 15), and James says that Abraham was justified IN THE GEN. 15 SENSE "when" he sacrificed Isaac in ch. 22.

If you read Hebrews 11 closely it is not always talking about justifying faith. For example we have the following verses from Hebrews 11:

Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

Hebrews 11:29

29By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

Does this mean every Jew that believe God formed the universe ex nihilo was justified? Does v29 mean every one passed through the Red Sea was justified? Of course not. Therefore, because Abraham expressed faith in leaving Ur it doesnt mean he was justified by this event.

R. Sungenis: So then, God is arbitrary. Sometimes when we exhibit faith, he justifies us (Genesis 15), but other times we exhibit the same fiath, he doesn't justify us (Genesis 12). Not likely, especially in Hebrews 11, since Hebrews 11:8-11, Hebrews11:13-16 and Hebrews 11:17-19 give three events in Abraham's life, Genesis 12, 15 and 22, and they say that in each instance he had the same kind of faith. We know this because the Hebrew writer says that in Genesis 12 incident Abraham is "looking for the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God" (verse 11), and then he says the identical thing about the incident in Genesis 15: "they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one...for He has prepared a city for them." In each case, Abraham has a faith that allows him to set his sights on the kingdom of heaven. So how could Abraham exhibit the same faith in Genesis 12 that he does in Genesis 15, but only be justified in the latter?

As for those who crossed the Red Sea, the fact is, THEY ALL crossed the Red Sea. Nobody was left behind. What greater act of faith does one need in order to be justified? Does one also have to cross mountains and swim seas (cf. Romans 10:1-5), or is acquiring justification just simply matter of putting one's trust in God? Isn't that what Protestants teach? Aren't they the ones who always complain about Catholic having to do "works" in order to attain justification as opposed to simple faith? No, all the Israelites were justified who crossed the Red Sea. The problem came after they crossed the sea, for one by one they began to lose their faith, until they fell grievously into sin by worshiping the golden calf at Sinai. That is why Hebrews 3-4, which speaks about the Jews who crossed the Red Sea and went into the wilderness, is a prime example of how one can fall from salvation.

Interlocutor: Furthermore, this creates interpretation creates problems for Sungenis because he must argue that Abraham committed a mortal sin after leaving Ur and had to be justified in Genesis 15, because it is here that Paul claims God justified the ungodly Abraham.

R. Sungenis: Not so. The Catholic doctrine says that justification increases (as is the case with Abraham), and justification can be lost and regained (as is the case with David). The Council of Trent covers both of these.

Chapter 10

Concerning the Increase of Justification Received

Having, therefore, been thus justified and having been made the 'friends of God' and 'his domestics' [John 15:15; Eph 2;19], 'advancing from virtue to virtue' [Psalm 83:8], 'they are renewed' (as the Apostle says) 'from day to day' [2 Cor. 4:16], that is, by mortifying the members of their flesh [Colossians 3:5], and by 'presenting them as instruments of justice' [Romans 6:13, 19], **unto sanctification through the**

observance of the commandments of God and of the Church; in this justice received through increase and are further justified [Canons 24 and 32], as it is written: 'He that is just, let him be justified still' [Revelation 22:11], and again: 'Be not afraid to be justified even to death' [Eccl 18:22], and again: 'You see, that by works a man is justified and not by faith only' [James 2:24]. And this **increase of justice** Holy Church begs for, when she prays: 'Give unto us, O Lord, and increase of faith, hope and charity' [13th Sunday after Pentecost].

Canon 24) If anyone shall say, that justice received is not preserved and also not increased in the sight of God through good works but that those same works are only the fruits and signs of justification received, but not a cause of its increase: let him be anathema.

Canon 27) If anyone shall say that there is no mortal sin except that of infidelity, or that grace once received is not lost by any other sin however grievous and enormous, except the sin of infidelity: let him be anathema.

Interlocutor: So the point is not so much what justification's basis is, but that it occurs, according to Rome, throughout the Christian's life, not just at the beginning.

Also you have to understand Rome speaks of 3 types of justification. Initial justification, progressive justification, and re-justification. Even from Rome's perspective it is clear that Romans 4 is speaking of initial justification because it is speaking of the ungodly and how Abraham discovered what justification was. Therefore, Sungenis must explain why Abraham is being referred to as ungodly at this point if he was j

Ronnie | 01.28.09 - 4:42 pm | #

R. Sungenis: No, because Abraham is only an example of progressive justification, not re-justification. If Abraham doesn't lose his justification (i.e., he commits no mortal sin, as David did), then he has no need to be re-justified, but Abraham does have a need to continue his justification by faith and good works, ergo, Genesis 22 is another instance of his justification, as James clearly teaches in Jm 2:21-24.

Interlocutor: JJS, Re presuppositions, well, OK, if you want to chalk me up to chalking up. I suppose I'd rather characterize it as wanting to give presuppositions their due function in someone's argument. I don't see how that is necessarily dismissive of an argument. In fact, I see it as charitable. I know they read justification as a process because the NT teaches it. But that's not the only reason, just as it's not my only reason to read it to teach it as something declarative: I use private judgment and my own tradition to tell me what it teaches.

Re biting things, I don't quite follow. That was an honest question is all: how does Jesus fit into what appears to be an anthropomorphic reasoning? We have two men sinning and repenting time and again and that is our cue that that is how we become justified time and again. OK, so what does Jesus have to do with anything?

Zrim | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 5:08 pm | #

But Zrim, your objection only betrays your presupposed definition of justification (now you got ME doing it!).

You didn't answer my question, though. What's to stop someone else from saying, "Oh, so you get forgiven at conversion, then sin and need forgiveness again, and again the next day? Sheesh, what's Jesus for if this has to be repeated?"

JJS | 01.28.09 - 5:14 pm | #

JJS says,

"Well, try adopting their nomenclature for a minute. Would you say that God forgives the ungodly? Of course - once they repent, God forgives them (and this happens throughout your life). The Catholic would just say that "justification" is similar to forgiveness in that way. "

Yeah, the whole "once they repent"- throws this into a tailspin. But I'm probably just too dense to be helped. I get that they collapse categories that we hold distinct, but we've got big differences as it regards the nature of the righteousness that establishes justification. Much less a very different working definition of what justification is. Even so, as it regards Sungenis' specific argument, I can't make it work out of Rom. 4. The whole forgiveness-justification trade off, does not adequately accomodate the decretal or federal thread and even an mystical union emphasis to the ordo doesn't get you all the way to the roman position.- Though it comes way to close for my comfort.

sean | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 5:16 pm | #

R. Sungenis: I don't know what the "decretal or federal thread and even an mystical union emphasis to the ordo" has to do with the simple fact that David is being used as an example of a man who has received justification upon repentance of sin. Why make it complicated with predestination and an ordo salutis? Just deal with the simple facts Paul is giving you.

Interlocutor: Jesus is our one mediator. His sacrifice on Calvary and conquering of death makes our conquering of death possible.

Lets just keep that in mind. We need Jesus.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 5:16 pm | #

JJS,

Allow me to answer:

You didn't answer my question, though. What's to stop someone else from saying, "Oh, so you get forgiven at conversion, then sin and need forgiveness again, and again the next day? Sheesh, what's Jesus for if this has to be repeated?"

You initial forgiveness at conversion seals the legal deal. God is no longer judging you based on your eternal destination or you being a member of His family. However, now that you are a member of the family He is your Father and you are His child. Being that He is your Father you should ask His forgiveness when you have disobeyed His commandments. Also being that He is your Father, He will discipline you for your sins, because what Father doesn't discipline His son? Jesus did not take away this punishment, nor did He removed fatherly displeasure towards disobedient children. That fatherly displeasure is removed when you repent and ask His forgiveness before He takes off the belt. :)

Ronnie | 01.28.09 - 5:27 pm | #

JJS,

I'm raising a question, not an objection disguised as a question. I know Catholics have a place for Jesus. I just want to know what it is if Abe and Dave are the ones pointed to when defining or describing justification. But to try and answer you, nothing is to stop that question. But I'd rather be asked what place Jesus has in my scheme. Call me a control freak, but it's a much better question than to presuppose my scheme has no place for him.

Sean,

Jesus is our one mediator. His sacrifice on Calvary and conquering of death makes our conquering of death possible...We need Jesus.

Thanks. My Arminians say the same thing. I know Jesus is very much a part of everyone's scheme. But the more the discussions evolve the clearer it becomes that everyone means different things by the above sort of utterance. When I describe justification I point to Jesus, not Abe and Dave.

Zrim | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 8:17 pm | #

Zrim,

Come on. Play fair. We're talking about Abraham in the context of Justification because PAUL talked about Abraham in the context of Justification and so did James.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 8:46 pm | #

And...we're not pointing to Abraham like he is the source of the Grace that saves us.

Sean | 01.28.09 - 8:47 pm | #

Sean,

We're talking about Abraham in the context of Justification because PAUL talked about Abraham in the context of Justification and so did James.

I know. Again, I am trying to get clear the relationships between the players from your point of view. If I understand it, Abraham was justified by Jesus multiple times, and so was David. Is that right? If that's true, then at some point in time each began as righteous. This seems like a basic difference between our schemes because ours disallows that they ever began as righteous.

R. Sungenis: No, we are not saying they "began as righteous." In the very Psalm that David is repenting of his sins of adultery and murder, he says in Psalm 51:5 that he was "born in iniquity." This is Original Sin. We don't know much about Abraham's beginning, but we can rest assured that he wasn't exempt from Original Sin. END

Interlocutor: And...we're not pointing to Abraham like he is the source of the Grace that saves us.

Of course not, that would be absurd.

Zrim | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 9:47 pm | #

Skipped over all 48 responses. Sorry if this is redundant, but I'm not so sure Sungenis' point is all that clarifying or helpful. Indeed, Calvin's much more clear:

"Therefore, God does not, as many stupidly believe, once for all reckon to us as righteousness that forgiveness of sins concerning which we have spoken in order that, having obtained pardon for our past life, we may afterwards seek righteousness in the law; this would be only to lead us into false hope, to laugh at us, and mock us. For since no perfection can come to us so long as we are clothed in this flesh, and the law moreover announces death and judgment to all who do not maintain perfect righteousness in works, it will always have grounds for accusing and condemning us unless, on the contrary, God's mercy counters it, and by continual forgiveness of sins repeatedly acquits us" (Ins. 3.14.10).

I don't know about you, but it sure sounds to me like he's saying I'm repeatedly acquitted (justified) insofar as I repent. And last I checked, Calvin has yet to be "rehabilitated."

Chris Donato | Homepage | 01.28.09 - 11:44 pm | #

Zrim,

You're right the question does fall down to Christ and if we receive the "totus christus" at regeneration then one must ask how many times does Christ need to die and rise again in the life of just one Romanist?

R. Sungenis: Just once, but the grace that flows from that one sacrifice is good for a multitude of sins. Calvinists can try to convince themselves that the second major topic of the New Testament (i.e., the warning not to fall from salvation), is only speaking to those who are not really saved in the first place, but that's not what you get when you read the New Testament at face value. It's only when we start viewing the Scripture from our "presuppositions" and "ordo salutis" that we can miss the clear teaching of Scripture.

Interlocutor: And you are also correct about presuppositions. One can't look at any dogma of Justification without looking at what informs that dogma. For Romanism it starts with libertarian free will and donum superadditum and builds a theory of justification from there.

GAS | 01.29.09 - 12:15 am | #

R. Sungenis: No, Catholicism starts from Scripture. That's why the example of David fits so well in Catholic theology, but doesn't fit in Protestant theology.

Interlocutor: Interesting passage, Chris. I just looked it up, and mine reads the same as yours (Battles edition). I wonder what the Latin text says?

By the way, I was surprised that no one brought up my objection to Sungenis's position, i.e., that his minor premise is assumed but nowhere proven (at least as articulated in this article).

JJS | 01.29.09 - 2:19 am | #

Jason: ask yourself this question: "If you exchange the word 'justification' for 'forgiveness' in the Catholic's argument, is the graciousness of the gospel undermined?" If not (and that's the right answer), then perhaps they're simply employing different terminology than we are.

There is a key difference, and that key difference is, once regeneration/justification happens and sanctification begins in the Protestant Ordo, the Protestant, resting on a legal acquittal, need not ever look back. (That is not to say, there needs not be a constant striving after holiness).

R. Sungenis: "There needs not be a constant striving after holiness"?? Sounds pretty presumptuous to me. And concerning the "Protestant Ordo," the fact is, as my book *Not By Faith Alone* points out, Protestants have various versions of the ordo salutis, even in the Reformed camp, that contradict each other. One says regeneration comes first, another says faith comes first. Some say repentance is an act of faith, some say no (e.g., Michael Horton). Some say works are a sign of faith, others say faith stands alone. I'm sorry to say, you are all over the map when it comes to making the crucial distinctions.

Interlocutor: For the "forgiven" Catholic, there must be a constant re-assessment. There is no assurance of salvation. Only a "hope I'm doing the right things." That "legal acquittal" can come and go, and after "initial justification," it comes and goes based on the *works* that the Catholic does or doesn't accomplish.

John Bugay | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 6:48 am | #

R. Sungenis: That is a caricature of the Catholic position. The Catholic, indeed, has assurance of his salvation. When I woke up this morning, I knew that I would go to heaven if I die then. I know because I am certain I have no mortal sins on my soul. In fact, my assurance of salvation is guaranteed by the Church, for it was the Church that gave me the official divine absolution for my sins (by the power granted to them by Christ in John 20:23 and Matt 16:19). I don't have to depend on a feeling or how much I can convince myself that I'm saved. The Church itself, the very Church that Jesus established, gives me that assurance. The "works" only increase the justification I already have, and thus increase my assurance of salvation. Of course, if I refuse to do the "works," this means I've repudiated the Christian faith and have sinned mortally, and therefore I myself have thrown away my salvation. But that makes sense. Why should I be assured of salvation if I'm not willing to live like a Christian?

Interlocutor: And further to that, the Catholic is not tied just to "good works and holiness," but is bound to the confessional and the "mass," for example. And these are binding things.

Once you are bound to the "mass," then you are accepting the "re-presentation" of Christ on the cross, and this "re-presentation" has none of the once-for-all grand overtones of forgiveness that the Reformed Christ's death and resurrection carry. No, this is a rote chore that must be re-attended to, or else you fall into "mortal sin."

The caricature of the Catholic conscience has its basis in the reality of that system. It is not just "forgiveness." The Catholic stuff is all bound together in a package.

John Bugay | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 6:55 am | #

R. Sungenis: No, the Mass is there to give you the divine power so that you don't fall into sin. The Mass is nothing more than the once-for-all graces of the Cross administered to the Christian through the heavenly mediation of Christ, so says Hebrews 9:23-24. The major theme of Hebrews is falling away from the faith. The second major theme of Hebrews is how to stop from falling away by depending on the mediation of Christ. END

There is no assurance of salvation. Only a "hope I'm doing the right things."

Did not Paul say, "Less even I be disqualified?" Reading Paul, one does not get the impression that he had assurance but rather hope. I think we're in good company on this topic.

Sean | 01.29.09 - 8:21 am | #

You're not exegeting the text properly. From what is it that Paul will be "disqualified"? Does this mean he will lose his salvation? In the light of Romans 8, do you think Paul honestly thinks "I will lose my salvation" when he says, "lest I be disqualified"?

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 8:30 am | #

R. Sungenis: Actually, the text, more literally translated, says, "lest I become reprobate," from the Greek *adikimos*, which is used exclusively in contexts of falling from salvation (Rm 1:28; 2Cor 13:5-7; 2Tim 3:8; Tit 1:6; Heb 6:8). END

Interlocutor: John,

This is one topic which I am completely confident that the Catholic Church wins exegetically from the text alone.

Galatians 5:4 "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

John 15:5-6 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

Hebrews 6:4-6 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Revelation 2:4-5 "'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-unless you repent."

Etc etc.

R. Sungenis: My book, *Not By Faith Alone*, has a whole chapter (4) dedicated to cataloguing the passages, with exegesis, of the New Testament's teaching that one can fall from salvation. Every book of the New Testament, except possibly for Philemon, contains the same warning. END

Interlocutor: I know, I know. I am not interpreting these right?

"assurance" is just a doctrine that is ancillary and a necessary rejoinder to Calvinism. It has no witness in Orthodox and it biblically untenable.

Sean | 01.29.09 - 8:37 am | #

I know, I know. I am not interpreting these right?

Correct.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 9:35 am | #

The concept of "Venial" Sins is also derived from all of this. From the CCC:

1862 One commits venial sin when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.

1863 Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness."

While he is in the flesh, man cannot help but have at least some light sins. But do not despise these sins which we call "light": if you take them for light when you weigh them, tremble when you count them. A number of light objects makes a great mass; a number of drops fills a river; a number of grains makes a heap. What then is our hope? Above all, confession.

How does this align with the Reformed concept of justification?

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 10:17 am | #

John,

... has none of the once-for-all grand overtones of forgiveness that the Reformed Christ's death and resurrection carry

If all your sins were paid for on the cross, and that pardon was applied to you at your initial justification, then why do you still daily ask forgiveness for your sins, when you pray the Lord's prayer? Or is Christ's redeeming work applied to you on a daily basis through your prayers and use of the other means of grace? If the latter, how is that so different from the Catholic?

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 10:22 am | #

If all your sins were paid for on the cross, and that pardon was applied to you at your initial justification, then why do you still daily ask forgiveness for your sins, when you pray the Lord's prayer?

Our God is not a God who dribbles out nickels and dimes. That's the thing about Catholicism. It makes itself the gatekeeper even to get in and stay within the sheepfold. It alone can dispense God's favor.

Here's a crazy logical dilemma. To become a "sheep", you've first got to get into the "sheepfold."

<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/pa...cc/para/754.htm>

754 "The Church is, accordingly, a sheepfold, the sole and necessary gateway to which is Christ. It is also the flock of which God himself foretold that he would be the shepherd, and whose sheep, even though

governed by human shepherds, are unfailingly nourished and led by Christ himself, the Good Shepherd and Prince of Shepherds, who gave his life for his sheep.

The Catholic Church is to those sheep like a driver of an ice cream truck, with one of those waist-mounted change dispensers. The Protestant doctrine of justification rightly trashes the entire medieval grace-dispensing apparatus. It takes the coin machine off the pope's belt, and enables free and direct interaction with God.

Here is where the differences in justification really lead:

"The Reformers' forensic understanding of justification ... the idea of an immediate divine imputation [of righteousness] renders superfluous the entire Catholic system of the priestly mediation of grace by the Church." (Bruce McCormack, *What's at Stake in the Current Debates over Justification*, from *Husbands and Treier's Justification*, pg 82.)

There is a concept of "Redemption Accomplished And Applied." It might be helpful to you in this regard to look it up.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 10:37 am | #

R. Sungenis: And the example of David in Romans 4:5-8 disproves that very Reformed thesis of McCormack's.

Interlocutor: John,

Thanks, but I didn't find your answer to my question. Why do you ask daily for the forgiveness of your sins, when you pray the Lord's Prayer, if your sins were all paid for on the cross, and that once-and-for-all pardon was applied to you at your initial justification? Does any particular application of redemption to you at time t only cover the sins committed prior to time t? Or are you just wasting God's time and revealing a lack of trust in Christ's completed work when you daily say that line in the Lord's Prayer?

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 10:50 am | #

R. Scott Clark: Jason, I took the liberty of also skipping a lot of comments, but I quite disagree. The point of Heb 11 is analogous to the point of James 2. It's the distinction between justification and vindication or illustration or demonstration. James insists that those who claim to have faith demonstrate (not form) the reality of that faith and Heb 11 illustrates the reality of the faith of those who believed, who trusted and who acted on the basis of that trust.

R. Sungenis: First, as I noted above, Hebrews 11 cites the very instance of faith in Genesis 15 that the Reformed persuasion insists was Abraham's only and initial justification. So how could Hebrews 11, when it refers to Genesis 15, be referring to both a justification and a vindication at the same time? I'll tell you why. It's the fallacious argument that James 2 is referring to a "demonstration" of justification. I cover this in depth in my book *Not By Faith Alone*. I will quote a few excerpts here:

Protestant Interpretations of James 2

Protestant theologians have tried in innumerable ways to downplay the significance of James's teaching regarding justification.¹ In short, their goal is to reduce James's writings to a mere afterthought of Paul's, a sort of addendum to Paul's thought, but nothing monumental or in any way modifying Paul's teaching. The following are some of the ways they make these attempts:

1) Since Protestant theology views Paul's use of justification as a "declared righteousness,"² consistency in definition would suggest applying the same meaning to the epistle of James. Some Protestants have agreed with this line of thinking. A difficulty arises, however, since Paul and James are dealing with two different time periods in Abraham's life; hence, these theologians realize that in order to safeguard their theology they must distinguish the respective justifications in some way. Since the Protestant conception of "declared righteousness" in justification is a *one-time* act never to be repeated again, they must then place Abraham's justification in Genesis 22 into a different category than his justification in Genesis 15. To solve this problem, they classify the justification in Genesis 15:6 as Abraham's *actual* justification. Conversely, they propose that because James is confirming this prior justification of Abraham, and since God actually "speaks" to Abraham on that occasion about his deed,³

¹ R. C. Sproul attempts to minimize these by citing G. C. Berkouwer's summary of three options: (1) James was polemicizing against Paul, (2) James was polemicizing against antinomianism, (3) Paul and James have different problems in view and are not struggling with each other at all. Sproul opts for the third of these explanations (*Faith Alone*, op. cit., p. 162).

² That is, God "declares" a person righteous even though intrinsically he is still unrighteous. Chapter 5 gives more detail on this aspect of the Protestant concept of justification.

³ Genesis 22:12: "Now I know that you fear God" and "because you have done this, I swear, says the Lord."

God, in Genesis 22, is thus *declaring* that Abraham was previously justified in Genesis 15:6. Hence, they separate the general category of “declared righteousness” into an *actual* and *declared* righteousness.⁴

2) Another explanation of Abraham’s justification in Genesis 22 is to view it as a justification before *men* rather than God. Being viewed and judged by men would eliminate any salvific meaning to James’s use of justification, since only God can issue or determine justification. Hence, only the justification of Genesis 15:6 could be the salvific justification of Abraham while the justification in Genesis 22:12 would only demonstrate Abraham’s previous justification. Protestants who support this view assert that the words *you see* in the sentence “you see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” in James 2:24 indicates that this passage is referring to what *people* see on the outside. The argument then states that although James uses the word *justified*, he does not intend to use this term in the same soteriological sense as Paul does, (i.e., as a one-time forensic imputation), but only in the demonstrative sense. Hence, in viewing his works, Abraham finally proved his justification to men when he offered Isaac on the altar, but he was already justified before God by *faith alone* in Genesis 15:6.⁵ What men see in Genesis 22 is the *fruit* of Abraham’s prior justification, but Genesis 22 was not the point at which Abraham was legally and actually justified.⁶

3) In an attempt to bolster this reasoning Protestant theologians postulate that James’s use of the word *justified* is not the same as Paul’s. They say that Paul uses *justified* in the sense of Abraham having his sins forgiven through the righteousness of Christ but that James is using *justified* in the sense of Abraham being *vindicated* by his works.⁷ The work of offering Isaac, then, is said only to *vindicate*

⁴ The 19th century Scottish theologian, James Buchanan, espoused this view (see *The Doctrine of Justification*, pp. 243-249). Buchanan maintained that declaratory justification was applicable to the second chapter of James despite, as we will see later, the extreme difficulties and tensions this view created.

⁵ Various Protestant apologists offer this explanation, in one form or another. Evangelical R. C. Sproul adds another spin. He claims that it is not necessary for God to view the works of men because he already knows what they believe in their heart (Faith Alone, op. cit., p. 165). We must insist that though it is true that God knows the heart of every individual, Scripture does not teach that God judges men merely on their good intentions or aspirations. Scripture treats this subject from a phenomenological perspective, as Genesis 22 expressly states when the angel, speaking for God, says, “Now I know that you fear God.” God does not judge Abraham’s faith from his foreknowledge but from the evidence Abraham displays. Likewise, Scripture gives no support to the notion that God does not require evidence of obedience because he sees into our heart. Rather, Scripture teaches that God’s evaluation of the heart depends upon and is consequent with man’s actions, e.g., “Forgive and deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of men), so that they will fear you and walk in your ways...” (2 Chronicles 6:30-31). Conversely, if followed to its logical conclusion, Sproul’s reasoning would make any act of obedience on the part of man superfluous. Chapter 5 deals more full with this problem.

⁶ While many hold this view, Protestant apologist James R. White, has expounded it repeatedly (debate with Fr. Mitchell Pacwa, 1991). Protestants use the word “legal” or “forensic” to characterize Abraham’s justification, which we will take up in more detail in chapters 5-6. Suffice it to say that Protestant theology believes there is only one point in Abraham’s life in which he was justified before God, that is, Genesis 15:6, when God “credits righteousness to Abraham for his faith.” Most Protestants claim this is a one-time legal act of imputation in which God declares Abraham righteous and is not to be repeated.

⁷ E.g., Joel Beeke in *Justification By Faith Alone*, op. cit., p. 84; R. C. Sproul in *Faith Alone*, p. 166.

Abraham's prior legal justification established in Genesis 15:6. In effect, these interpreters suggest that James 2:24 could read, "you see that a person is *vindicated* by what he does..."⁸

4) A related explanation of James' language postulates that James is not speaking of one who is striving for salvation, but only of the degree of *sanctification* one experiences in this life by doing good works.⁹ This would mean that the justification mentioned in James 2:24 is not really a justification at all but some aspect of one's sanctification.

5) Also relevant to the above reasoning is the suggestion that James is concerned only with the *kind* of faith required for justification. This theory attempts to fuse faith with works so as to make one theological category in which to impute the individual with righteousness for justification. The work, then, becomes merely the *qualifier* of faith rather than a separate and independent *quality* to be added to faith in order to procure justification. In this way, one can maintain the language of *faith alone* since the issue of justification is now limited to discussing the *quality* of faith in the individual rather than the quality or quantity of his works, which will be judged separately and for entirely different reasons.¹⁰

6) A more subtle attempt to downplay James's teaching on justification is to relegate his entire book to the category of *wisdom* literature. Such analysis postulates that, similar to Old Testament wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs), James is not teaching *theory*, only *practice*. They conclude that James is not concerned with doctrinal matters, and thus one should not take his statements as dogmatic formulations of the doctrine of justification. In this view, Paul is the only teacher of soteriological doctrine.¹¹

⁸ The highly respected Reformed theologian, J. Gresham Machen, faulted his Protestant brethren for assigning one meaning of justification to Paul and another to James. Machen appealed to Galatians 5:6 to balance Paul and James. (*Machen's Notes on Galatians*, "Faith and Works," ed. John Skilton, p. 220; Also, J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to its Literature and History*, pp. 238ff). The Dutch Reformed theologian, Hermann Bavinck, agreed: "It is indeed not right to say that Paul speaks only of the *justification of the sinner* and James the *justification of the just*." Historically, it was Calvin who first used Galatians 5:6 to depart from Luther's strict view of *faith alone* (see chapter 9 for further details).

⁹ The distinction between justification and sanctification is a major Protestant belief. Since justification is a one-time act of imputation, anything after justification must be placed in the category of sanctification, and thus not related to whether one is ultimately saved or not. This is a major fallacy in Protestant thinking that we will address in chapters 4-5.

¹⁰ Protestant apologists often posit arguments of this kind, claiming that Paul and James are dealing with two entirely different definitions of faith (e.g., James White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, p. 254, n. 5). Protestant exegesis of James invariably seeks to create a distinction among Paul's and James's view of faith, works or justification, respectively. Different authors will attempt to create one or more of these distinctions in the reader's mind depending on which one seems to work best to downplay James's impact on the discussion of justification. Once separated from faith, the judgment of works is usually relegated to the matter of whether the individual will obtain a personal reward in heaven.

¹¹ E.g., John Armstrong, *Justification By Faith Alone*, pp. 162-163; James White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, pp. 147-148.

7) Finally, a somewhat novel argument, presented to prove that James is not referring to a salvific justification, maintains that after Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, God does not say, "I will surely *justify* you" or "I will surely *credit you with righteousness*"; rather, he limits his language in Genesis 22:17 to "I will surely *bless* you." Since the language of *crediting with righteousness* appears in Genesis 15:6 but is absent from Genesis 22, the argument concludes Genesis 15:6 is the only instance of Abraham's justification.¹²

The Catholic Rejoinder

Obviously each of the above explanations is attempting to minimize the soteriological import of James's treatment of the doctrine of justification. It becomes evident by the sheer variety of explanations offered that the Protestant apologetic is desperately trying to downplay James's impact on the subject while urging the teaching of Paul with regard to the meaning and extent of justification. In effect, they hold up Paul as the grid through which any understanding of the epistle of James must first pass. Paul's teaching becomes a "canon within the canon" that can overrule the teaching of James. Unfortunately, doing so needlessly distorts the teaching of James. In the end, the various explanations offered, though plausible on the surface, contradict both the context within which James writes, the teaching of Paul, and the remaining teaching of Scripture. Let us see how this happens.

Countering the Protestant interpretation that "*you see*" in James 2:24 refers to what *man* sees as the fruit of one's salvation as opposed to what *God* sees for justification, is the mere fact that at Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son Isaac, no human beings witnessed the act. Even the two servants that Abraham took with him to the base of the mountain apparently had no knowledge concerning what Abraham was about to do. According to Genesis 22:5, Abraham told the two servants to wait in a designated area while he and Isaac went off privately to worship. Then, as Abraham is raising his knife to sacrifice Isaac, the only witnesses to the event are God and an angel. In fact, it is the angel who says, "Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Hence, every indication in the account is that the sacrifice of Isaac was an act designed specifically for God, not men, to witness. Genesis 22:1 makes the reason for this clear at the outset: "Some time later God tested Abraham." Thus it is God who is waiting for the outcome of that test. Neither the context of Genesis 22 nor James 2 suggests that the witness of men is even remotely significant in the story.

Regarding the notion that James is referring to a *vindication* rather than a *justification* of Abraham, the context of James 2 does not support such argumentation. First, it would certainly be illogical for James to use a non-salvific sense of the word *justified* when he is trying to make a case that one is "not justified by faith alone." In other words, if James were teaching a concept of *vindication* he could have chosen a word that solely and clearly refers to vindication, rather than a word that is commonly understood to refer to salvific justification. Second, if James had vindication in mind he could have simply said, "you see, a person is *vindicated* by works" without the addendum "and not by faith

¹² E.g., James G. McCarthy in *The Gospel According to Rome: Comparing Catholic Tradition and The Word of God*, p. 48.

alone.” The addition of “and not by faith alone” introduces a specific element and direction to his argument, for it clearly shows that James is attempting to correct a false notion about the solitude of faith in justification, not suggest that Abraham was merely vindicated by his works. Third, if James was arguing for the vindication of Abraham, this line of argumentation would only make sense if one of James’s opponents had claimed that Abraham was “*vindicated* by his faith alone.” If so, James would have easily refuted the argument by saying, “you see, a person is vindicated by what he does and not by faith alone.” Such refutation would have required James to use “*vindicated*” in the first part of his argument (verse 20-21) in order for him to use it in the latter part (verse 24); otherwise, the concept of vindication simply would have no referent in the context. If James meant to teach only vindication in verse 24, the syntactical structure of the sentence would require that the phrase “not by faith alone” have its referent in “is vindicated,” and thus the text would have to read as “you see, a man is vindicated by works and not vindicated by faith alone.” It would assert that one is vindicated not only by faith but also by works. We see, then, that by injecting the concept of *vindication* into James 2:24, Protestantism has actually done more damage to its case than would have otherwise occurred, for the concept of vindication must then apply to both faith and works, which then destroys faith itself as being salvific.

We can also attack this line of argumentation by examining the way the New Testament uses the word “justified.”¹³ Though it may be *possible* to construe the Greek word (*dikaioo*) as referring to a vindication, this is neither the normal sense of the word, nor is such a sense ever used in a soteriological context in the New Testament. This is significant, because if the meaning of *dikaioo* as referring to a vindication is not used elsewhere in the New Testament in the context of salvation, then there is no precedent for using it as such in James. James makes it clear when he opens the discussion in James 2:14 that he is setting up a salvation context by asking the rhetorical questions, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?”

Four, perhaps five, authors of the New Testament use the word *dikaioo*: Matthew, Luke, Paul, James, and John.¹⁴ Matthew uses *dikaioo* in 12:37 (“for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”). It is clear that Matthew’s context is one of salvation/damnation. Luke uses the word in his gospel and in the book of Acts. In Acts 13:39 he writes, “Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.” Obviously, Luke is using *justified* in reference to salvation. Paul uses *dikaioo* 27 times in his epistles but in only one place does he use it outside a soteriological context. However, in this single instance he is referring exclusively to God (i.e., Romans 3:4, “so that you may be justified in your sayings”). God is justified because he has the *quality* of justice within him, or because he is the subsisting source of all goodness and thus of all justice. Finally, James uses *dikaioo* three times, twice in reference to Abraham and once

¹³ The word “justified” is from the Greek verb *dikaioo* (δικαίω). It is the same word used by Paul and James when each refers to Abraham’s justification (cf., Romans 4:2 and James 2:24). There are other cognates of *dikaioo*, such as δικαίως, δικαιοσύνη, δικαίωμα, δίκαιος and δικαίωσις that we will cover in later chapters.

¹⁴ The fifth may be in Revelation 22:11. Here, though, there is a textual variant. A few Greek manuscripts contain the present imperative form of δικαιοθητω which is translated as “let him be righteous” whereas other manuscripts contain the noun δικαιοσύνη, followed by a predicate. This variant will be addressed more thoroughly in chapter 4.

in reference to Rahab, both, as noted above, within the context of salvation or damnation. Hence, we must conclude from this evidence that in the New Testament, *dikaioo*, when used in reference to man, deals exclusively with man's justification before God and its outcome of salvation or damnation. To claim, then, that James is using the word *dikaioo* differently from Paul is simply to beg the question.

Advocates of the vindication theory commonly refer to one usage of *dikaioo* in particular to support their contention that James may not be using the word "justified" in the same sense as Paul. John Calvin used this single example and many modern evangelicals continue to use it. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus says, "And wisdom is justified [*dikaioo*] by her works." Similarly, Luke 7:35 reads, "And wisdom is justified by all her children."¹⁵ The proposed argument is that these passages are using *dikaioo* in the sense of vindication or demonstration, not as a salvific justification.¹⁶ We respond to this argument as follows: Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:35 are not using *dikaioo* in a context that discusses the technical aspects of justification or the general category of salvation. In fact, it is only because the context of these verses does not concern itself with justification and salvation, not because *dikaioo* can normally be understood as demonstrative, that the meaning of *dikaioo* can be given a different nuance in these passages. A similar thing happens in poetry. Words that have a technical meaning in everyday speech suddenly take on a different nuance when put in a metaphorical or symbolic context. In such a case we should not misconstrue the metaphorical usage of a word with the technical or lexical meaning of the same word.¹⁷ Obviously, "wisdom" cannot be justified in the soteriological sense because it is an abstract virtue, not a man who needs to be saved from sin. Hence, when the word "justified" refers to "wisdom," its meaning must change to accommodate the poetic context in which it is placed. Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:35 are purely metaphorical contexts and thus they change the technical meaning of the word "justified." James 2:14-26 is not metaphorical. Thus, to assert that James is using *dikaioo* in the same sense as that used in Matthew and Luke requires valid linguistic reasons for doing so, not simply because one's theology demands that James must use *dikaioo* in the demonstrative sense. When applied to men, the New Testament always uses "justified" to mean forgiveness of sin, the maintaining of one's forgiven state (lest he fall from that state), the increase of grace from God, and the receiving of eternal life. All in all, when James and Paul use the term "justified," they are referring to an *active* event, not a passive demonstration.¹⁸

¹⁵ Greek....

¹⁶ For example, R. C. Sproul, in citing Luke 7:35, explains that the children are demonstrating wisdom, not reconciling wisdom to God by having babies. Sproul admits, however, that this is a "figurative" use of *dikaioo* (*Faith Alone*, op. cit., p. 166).

¹⁷ For example, in the metaphorical expression "you are the apple of my eye," we certainly should not understand "apple" as a person who was transformed into a piece of fruit in someone's eye. The technical understanding of an apple is a piece of fruit, but the poetic context changes the connotation of *apple* to a term of endearment. In any case, we cannot define the technical meaning of words by appealing to their use in poetic contexts.

¹⁸ Since the use of *δικαίωω* in Luke 7:35 is figurative, the only other possible reference for a demonstrative meaning is 1 Timothy 3:16, which speaks of Christ being "justified in the Spirit." Yet as Protestant Richard Gaffin points out, even in this instance the demonstrative application fails (*Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978, 1987) pp. 119-122). Gaffin insists that since "justified

That *vindication* cannot be James's meaning of the word *dikaioo* is seen even more clearly by his addition of Rahab to the discussion of justification. As James opens up the review of Rahab, he introduces her account by the phrase "In the same way..." (James 2:25). By this wording, James is connecting the justification of Abraham to the justification of Rahab and declaring that *they are the same*. We must conclude, then, that there is no theological difference in the way these two people were justified in the eyes of God. If there were a difference, then either James would be misleading us or God would have two systems of justification, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. The former is impossible: inspired Scripture could never mislead. According to many passages in the New Testament the latter is also impossible: God shows no favoritism between Jew and Gentile, and there is only one name under heaven by which men and women are saved. The importance of understanding the identical nature of Abraham's and Rahab's respective justifications becomes clear when we consider that James certainly does not view Rahab's justification as a *vindication*. Using Protestant terminology, we cannot say that Rahab was given a forensic imputation of justification *prior* to the meeting of the Israelite spies. Rahab was a prostitute who lived an immoral life until she encountered God through the Israelites. Her justification comes on the heels of her acceptance of the God of Israel and his laws, which would necessitate that she immediately repented of her evil ways and decided to live righteously. An *active event* took place in Rahab's relationship with God, not a demonstration of a previous justification. Hence, if Rahab is not *vindicated* but is truly *justified* during her encounter with the Israelite spies, and since James insists that Abraham was justified "*in the same way*," then we can only conclude that both Abraham in Genesis 22 and Rahab in Joshua 2 were salvifically *justified* before God, not *vindicated*.

We can critique the so-called "actual/declarative" model of Protestant James Buchanan in a similar fashion. Although it may be *theoretically* plausible to insert a two-stage justification — one actual, one declaratory — in Abraham's life, it is not possible to do so with Rahab. Rahab's justification is not divided into two phases as is Abraham's. Thus, using Buchanan's terms, if we are to understand Rahab's justification in James 2:25-26 as a *declared* justification, this leaves no room for her *actual* justification. On the other hand, if we are to understand the justification of Rahab in James 2:25-26 as her *actual* justification, then there is not only no room for her *declared* justification, there is also no *verbal* declaration from God in Joshua 2 that Rahab was justified. Moreover, if Rahab's justification in James 2:25-26 is an *actual* justification, then Abraham's justification in James 2:24 must also be an *actual* justification, since James states specifically that Rahab was justified "in the same way" as Abraham. This would of course mean that Abraham's justification in Genesis 22 was also an *actual* justification.

Another reason we must understand that Paul and James are using the same definition of the word *dikaioo* is that in clarifying the proper relation of faith and works, James 2:23 quotes from Genesis 15:6 ("Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as *righteousness*"). As noted above, this is the

by the Spirit" refers to the resurrection, "nothing warrants a different sense for the verb than its virtually uniform meaning elsewhere in Paul." Though Gaffin concludes that *dikaioo* in 1 Timothy 3:16 must then have a declarative meaning in keeping with Reformation thought, we must insist, conversely, that 1 Tim. 3:16 is yet another proof of the *transformational* dimension of *δικαίωω* by the mere fact that Christ in his resurrection was literally transformed from a state of death to a state of life.

same Genesis passage from which Paul quotes in Romans 4:3. The Greek word for “righteousness” is *dikaiosune*. Since both James and Paul quote from Genesis 15:6, both must be using the same meaning and have the same understanding of the word *dikaiosune*.¹⁹ That being the case, it would be totally incongruous for both of them to have the same definition of *dikaiosune*, but for one of them suddenly to have a different definition of its cognate *dikaioo* (“justified”). Yet Protestants must accept this incongruity or conclude even more incongruously that James is using two different senses of the same root word within two verses (i.e., James 2:23 and 2:24).²⁰ In addition, it would be totally inconsistent for Paul and James to be appealing to the same Old Testament verse (i.e., Genesis 15:6) to prove their respective points, the former choosing a forensic model wherein Abraham is an ungodly man imputed with someone else’s righteousness, and the latter choosing a demonstrative model wherein Abraham is a godly man who merely needs to demonstrate his justified state. What the Protestant position ends up saying is that the word *justified* for Paul means, “declared legally just” but for James means, “demonstrated to be declared legally just.” Suffice it to say that even the most ardent advocate of the forensic model cannot demonstrate the latter usage of *dikaioo* in Scripture.

We can critique the use of the demonstrative/vindicative model to explain Abraham’s justification in James 2:24 from a larger perspective. The demonstrative/vindicative model assumes that Abraham’s salvation is a foregone conclusion after Genesis 15:6. In turn, his justification needs only to be verified by a measurable act of obedience.²¹ The problem with this view is that the context of James 2, as well as the surrounding context of James 1-5, is not so concerned with the demonstration of faith as it is with whether one, in the end, will be saved or not. The question posed by James 2:14 is “Can faith save him?” (pointing to the future), not “Can he demonstrate that he is already saved?” (pointing to the past).²² Hence, if the person to whom James is speaking chooses not to perform the good works James details in 2:15 (e.g., feeding the hungry, clothing the naked), then the answer to the question posed in James 2:14 will be in the negative, that is, he will not be saved. The same must apply to Abraham and

¹⁹ The word *dikaiosune* (δικαιοσύνη) translates the Hebrew word *tsedaqah* (תְּצַדִּיק) from Genesis 15:6, unless Paul and James were using the Septuagint translation, which already contained δικαιοσύνη.

²⁰ Protestant Ronald Fung proposes that very thing. He writes: “The above exegesis has revealed two senses of ‘justification’ in James: (1) imputed righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) or forensic justification is attained as a gift by faith ([verse] 23); (2) justification (*dikaiousthai*) in the sense of a demonstration of the possession of genuine faith is by works ([verses] 21, 24, 25)” (op. cit., p. 157).

²¹ Fung commandeers the adjectival cognate *δίκαιος* from James 5:16 and uses it to refer to a “devout member of the believing community so that for Abraham to be ‘shown to be just’ means for him to be shown by his action of offering up Isaac, to be a true believer.” Fung continues that Abraham is “making good on the claim to have faith” that was put as a question in James 2:14, *viz.*, “can faith save him?” The problem with this view is that the context of James 2:13-26 is not concerned so much with how one will demonstrate his faith as with whether one will even be saved. To resolve this dilemma, Fung’s demonstrative/vindicative model assumes that Abraham’s salvation was already made absolute in Genesis 15:6 and that thus all Abraham needed to do was make that certainty evident in Genesis 22.

²² The word “save” is a Greek infinitive of purpose (σῶσαι) which is used to express the purpose of the action or state denoted by the principal verb. The aorist infinitive (used in James 2:14), when used in these cases to point to the future result of the main verb (in this case δύναται (“able”). New Testament examples of the aorist infinitive used to point to future results appear in Matthew 5:17; Luke 18:10; Acts 10:33, et al.

Rahab. A refusal from either to do the works of obedience required of them (i.e., not offering Isaac and not hiding the spies, respectively) would have put them in the same negative category in answer to the question posed in James 2:14, e.g., they would not be saved. Not applying the question of salvation to Abraham and Rahab with regard to their respective justifications would neutralize James 2:14 of its intent to probe and interrogate this very important area in their lives.

The Context of James 2

To prove that James is placing his material in a *soteriological* context as opposed to a mere *demonstrative* context, we need only observe how James opens up the matter for discussion....

(*Not By Faith Alone*, Pages 119-131)

R. Scott Clark: It might be helpful to distinguish between the declaration and the application or reception of the benefits of that declaration. The moment one trusts in the promise of God one receives the first benefit of the covenant of grace, acceptance with God. That first benefit, however, works itself out in the second benefit of the covenant, sanctification or, more broadly, salvation or deliverance from the effects of sin.

As to responding to Sungenis, if we don't address the assumption behind his argument we concede an essential but unstated premise to his argument.

R. Sungenis: So far, no one here has disqualified the "assumption."

R. Scott Clark: See the last two chs of the Olevian book where I juxtapose Olevianus on justification with Peter Canisius defending Trent and then discuss Olevianus' doctrine of sanctification.

One of the great purposes of Reformed federal/covenant theology was to secure a stable place for a rich doctrine of sanctification without jeopardizing the doctrine of justification.

Rome believes that the only way to get people sanctified is to make their justification contingent upon their sanctification. We understand that the only way to get people sanctified is to make it contingent upon their declarative justification. That's the difference between Rome's rationalism and the foolishness of the gospel.

R. Sungenis: Not quite. The Reformed problem is that they want to impose hard and fast distinctions onto biblical words (e.g., justification and sanctification) that simply can't sustain the weight of Reformed dogmatics. Reformed dogma loves to emphasize the distinctions between justification and

sanctification, but fails miserably in the coalescing of the two. Because Catholic theology sees both the distinction and the coalescing, it can accommodate both in its theology. Here's just a sample of this issue in my book *Not By Faith Alone*:

In regard to sanctification, there is no appreciable difference between it and justification. In fact, the grace received at baptism is called *sanctifying* grace.³ This is the grace that sets the individual apart for God and makes him holy, and it is because of this "holiness" that he becomes *just* or *justified* in the eyes of God, that is, because he is now intrinsically holy. Paul shows the inseparable and simultaneous application of justification and sanctification very clearly in 1 Corinthians 6:10-11:

...nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers
nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is
what some of you were. But you were *washed*, you were
sanctified, you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus
Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Here Paul speaks of a being "sanctified" and "justified" as a simultaneous event, an event that occurred when the person was "washed." The New Testament uses the word "washed" in only one

³See Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, op. cit., pp. 254-263. Ott explains, by reference to early and medieval theologians, and to the final formulation of the Council of Trent (1563), that the nature of sanctifying grace is: (1) "...a created supernatural gift distinct from God himself." Ott says this to distinguish grace from the God who issues grace. God is present in the soul as the agent of created grace, but he is not the grace. Grace can increase but God does not increase. Pope Leo XIII stated: "By means of grace, God dwells in the just soul as in a temple, in a way profoundly intimate and singular" (DS, 3338). Ott further explicates this concept in the following stipulations: (2) "...a supernatural state of being which is infused by God, and which permanently inheres in the soul." He says this to distinguish sanctifying grace from actual grace — actual grace being the intermittent grace given to prompt to or perform various acts; and also to distinguish mortal sin from venial sin, of which the latter does not destroy the grace that inheres in the soul. (3) "...is not a substance but a real accident which inheres in the soul-substance." He says this to confirm that sanctifying grace does not merely reside in converted man, but actually transforms man into a more divine-like being, yet without changing man's essence as man. (See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 110.) (4) "...a participation in the divine nature"). The *Catholic Catechism* (1994) states: "Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. *Habitual* grace, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call, is distinguished from *actual* graces which refer to God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification" (CC #2000).

other place. In that passage it refers to the act of baptism.⁴ Hence, as noted above, it is baptism that provides the grace of God. Paul treats both “sanctification” and “justification” as a past event that began at baptism.⁵ The terms are virtually interchangeable. The context of the passage supports this interchange, since it deals exclusively with the Corinthian’s conduct, not the appropriation of an alien righteousness. Moreover, though a Protestant *ordo salutis* would expect “justified” to precede “sanctified,” Paul juxtaposes these terms and implies that there is no chronological order to the relationship. In fact, the verbal form “justified” *never* precedes “sanctified” in the New Testament.⁶ In

⁴At the baptism of Paul in Acts 22:16, Luke records the event as “Get up, be baptized and wash away your sins.” The Greek word for “wash away” is ἀπολούω, appearing only twice in the New Testament. The connection between the “washing” and baptism is reinforced by the fact that it is Paul who is being baptized in Acts 22:16, and is teaching the same “washing” to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 6:11 as the moment their sins were taken away.

⁵Both “sanctified” (ἡγιασθητε) and “justified” (ἐδικαιώθητε) are aorist verbs, as is “washed” (ἀπελούσασθε). The only difference among them is that “washed” is in the middle voice, while “sanctified” and “justified” are in the active voice. Lutheran commentator R. C. H. Lenski rightly comments on the meaning of the middle voice in this instance: “This middle ἀπελούσασθε does not mean: “you were washed” (passive)...nor “you washed yourselves” (ordinary reflexive middle)...but: “you let yourselves be washed” (causative or permissive middle)...Paul is, of course, speaking about baptism, but when he uses ἀπολούειν he at once names the effect of baptism, the spiritual washing away of sin and guilt, the cleansing by pardon and justification. This causative or permissive middle, which is exactly like the same middle ἐβαπτίσαντο used in 10:2, adds what the passive would omit, namely that with their own hearts the Corinthians themselves desired and accepted this washing and cleansing.” In commenting on the passives “sanctified” and “justified,” Lenski continues: “This does not mean that the passives are changed and now receive a middle tinge; they remain what they are. But the Corinthians could not also be sanctified and justified by God (passive) if they had not in their own hearts desired and accepted the true cleansing of baptism” (*The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1963) pp. 250-251). See also the *Expositor’s Greek Testament*, pp. 817-818. See chapter 5 for further study on the relationship between ἡγιασθητε and ἐδικαιώθητε in 1 Cor. 6:11.

⁶The noun form “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) precedes the noun form “sanctification” (ἁγιασμός) in two places: Romans 6:19 (“...so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness”); and 1 Corinthians 1:30 (“Christ Jesus...that is, our righteousness, holiness [sanctification] and redemption”). In the former case, we understand “righteousness” as the categorical goal, whereas “holiness” is what the individual personally becomes. In the latter case, we attribute all three aspects to Christ as the source of anything we personally attain. Neither passage, however, is attempting to give a chronological order to justification and sanctification. Revelation 22:11 is the only biblical passage where the verb form “justified” precedes the verb form “sanctified” but these forms are in two separate clauses and would not qualify as any type of *ordo salutis*. The Council of Trent uses the verbal form δικαιωθῆτω with ἔτι (“let him be justified still”) to show

many instances, the New Testament writers use the word “sanctified” or “sanctification” where one would expect, or not be surprised to see, “justified” or “justification.”⁷

the progression of justification in Revelation 22:11. (NB: There is a textual variant in this verse. The verbal form δικαιωθῆτω (“let him be justified”) is supported by the historian Eusebius (c. 340); the Clementina Vulgate of 1592; minuscule 2020 from the 1500s, and a few minor minuscules (*Novum Testamentum*, eds. E. Nestle and K. Aland (Germany: Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, 1927)). This would seem to weigh against the verbal form being the true text except for the fact that only 2 out of 52 papyri contain fragments of the book of Revelation, only 2 uncials out of 46 contain the parts of the book, and 144 minuscules out of 655 contain parts of Revelation (*The Greek New Testament*, eds. Kurt Aland, et al., 3rd ed. (United Bible Society, 1975)). We can also point out that the verbal form “let him be justified” would match the verbal forms “let him be sanctified” (ἀγιασθήτω) and “let him be vile” (ῥυπανθήτω) used in the same passage, which have no textual variants. In any case, the addition of “let him do” (ποιησάτω) after the noun form δικαιωσύνη serves to verbalize the noun).

⁷e.g., Acts 26:18, in which Jesus connects the turning away from Satan to God, and being forgiven, with *sanctification*, not justification (“so that they may receive forgiveness of sin and a place among those who are sanctified [ἡγιασμένοις] by faith in me”); 1 Peter 1:2, in which Peter connects predestination with *sanctification* (“who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God...through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” [ἐν ἀγιασμῷ πνεύματος]); 2 Thessalonians 2:13, in which *sanctification* and faith are connected directly to being chosen for salvation (“...because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit [ἐν ἀγιασμῷ πνεύματος] and through belief in the truth”); Hebrews 10:29, in which the sacred writer connects blood with *sanctification* (“treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him [ἡγιασθη]”). (NB: This language would be especially troublesome for the Reformed persuasion, since the passage specifies this individual has fallen from *sanctification*. The Reformed view maintains that sanctification cannot take its place in the *ordo salutis* unless justification has already occurred, yet it also maintains that if one falls from faith, he was never justified originally). See also Jude 1 and Ephesians 5:26.

R. Scott Clark: So the papist critic says it is "weak" and I say, "Amen!" God uses the weak and beggarly elements to confound the wise and sophisticated things and persons of this age. How foolish to propose to redeem sinners by sending God the Son to become incarnate of a lowly virgin, to live in humiliation, and by dying shameful death! No, he should have come in majesty and enthroned himself in a Roman Palace, with pomp and glory and Swiss Guards. Yes, now there's a "Savior" that makes sense!

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the »invisible« things of God as though they were clearly »perceptible in those things which have actually happened« (Rom. 1:20; cf. 1 Cor 1:21-25),

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

21. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

R. Scott Clark | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 10:55 am | #

R. Sungenis: Interesting that Dr. Clark appeals to this kind of argumentation. We Catholics use the same arguments against the Calvinists who refuse to see that God takes the "weak and beggarly elements" of the earth (bread) to come to his people with his body and blood (Matt 26:26; Jn 6:54); who uses the "weak and beggarly elements" of water to save his people (John 3:5); who uses "weak" men as His instruments to forgive the peoples' sin (John 20:23); who uses the "weak and beggarly elements" of oil so that sins may be forgiven (Jam 5:14).

Interlocutor: Scott,

Rome believes that the only way to get people sanctified is to make their justification contingent upon their sanctification.

Actually, that's not an accurate description of the Catholic position. We believe that the only way to "get people sanctified" is to sanctify them. We believe that God always "calls the thing what it actually is".

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 11:00 am | #

Thanks, but I didn't find your answer to my question. Why do you ask daily for the forgiveness of your sins, when you pray the Lord's Prayer, if your sins were all paid for on the cross, and that once-and-for-all pardon was applied to you at your initial justification? Does any particular application of redemption to you at time t only cover the sins committed prior to time t? Or are you just wasting God's time and revealing a lack of trust in Christ's completed work when you daily say that line in the Lord's Prayer?

R. Sungenis: The basic problem here is that neither Bryan's sins nor John's sins were "all paid for on the cross." This is the fundamental problem with all Reformed dogmatics and most of Protestant thought altogether. Christ did not "pay" for anyone's sins, in the sense that he took the punishment for their sin. When 1 Cor 6:20 says "you are bought with a price," it doesn't specify what the price is. The fact is, the punishment for sin is eternal damnation. Anything less, and God would be unjust. But Christ didn't suffer eternal damnation, contrary to Calvin. Rather, Christ became a "propitiation" for sin, that is, Christ appeased the Father's wrath against mankind through sacrifice, and that appeasement opened, once again, the possibility for man to be saved. But, the Calvinist, because his dogmatics overrules the plain teaching of Scripture, will only allow himself to believe that God "paid for" the sins of the elect, and that payment had to be an eternal damnation, and thereby God could predestine some and damn others before time began, for little of an effect than to "show his glory," be it from a supralapsarian or infralapsarian perspective. This is why the Calvinist must add the word "elect" to 1 Timothy 2:4, or why he must reinterpret 1 John 2:2 and ignore that Christ is a "propitiation for the whole world." There is more to this critique in *Not By Faith Alone* and my other book, *Not By Bread Alone*.

The reason Bryan prays the Lord's Prayer on a daily basis is because Bryan sins everyday. And if Bryan happens to sin mortally, as David did when he committed adultery and murder, then Bryan loses his justification. Bryan can get his justification back if he sincerely repents of his sin, as David did. Bryan can call on God for repentance because Christ's propitiatory sacrifice opened the pathway to God for salvation that had been closed with Adam. END

Interlocutor: Bryan -- I am a sinner and I understand my position with respect to Christ.

It's like C.S. Lewis said, I don't pray because it changes God, I pray because it changes me. Christ was not speaking to me personally and directly in Matt 6. (Nor in John 6). He was speaking to an audience full of Jewish people who yet to understand that the Messiah was in their midst.

I may pray the Lord's prayer in the form given in Scripture because it is an exceptional model for prayer. But I don't imagine for a minute that the line "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" means that my justification is in any sense not as full or complete or forensic as it was August 19, 1979 (or for that matter, "from the foundation of the world.)

As to your statement, "We believe that God always "calls the thing what it actually is" ... I've demonstrated time and again that while God calls the thing what it is, Rome has repeatedly relied on equivocation and double meanings of words. You have to make a better case than that.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 11:11 am | #

John,

If all your sins are already forgiven, and have been since your initial justification, then how is the Lord's Prayer "an exceptional model" for daily prayer if it implies that our sins are still in need of forgiveness? Would the Lord's Prayer be more theologically accurate if that line were changed to "thank you for having forgiven all my sins"? If not, why not?

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 11:34 am | #

I told you, Jesus did not tell me to pray "The Lord's Prayer." He spoke it to his disciples and followers who as yet had no awareness that he was the Messiah. As such it is perfectly "theologically accurate".

Your attempt to speculate about how it should or shouldn't be changed is ludicrous.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 11:47 am | #

Bryan, Why do you ask daily for the forgiveness of your sins, when you pray the Lord's Prayer, if your sins were all paid for on the cross, and that once-and-for-all pardon was applied to you at your initial justification?

R. Scott Clark: For whatever it may be worth, my understanding, from a Reformed point of view, is this: as a guiding principle, the Christian life is one of response to what has been done on our behalf more than some sort of effort to effect something in the present or future. This is no less true when it comes a certain utterance in the Lord's Prayer.

Just as we don't think our daily bread won't come if we don't pray for it, our daily forgiveness (justification) is not dependent upon actually asking for it. There was a time and place where looking upon upraised serpents actually kept people from actually dying. But that's the thing about type and shadow, old covenants and new: while there's a lot of carry-over, there are also significant differences.

RSC,

R. Sungenis: Types and shadows have little to do with it. It has more to do with how Reformed dogmatics ends up taking the simple words of Scripture and distorting them to fit Reformed dogmatics. When one comes to the point in his theology that he can say, with a straight face: "our daily forgiveness (justification) is not dependent upon actually asking for it," then it is time to go back to the theological drawing board. The fact is, the Lord's Prayer is superfluous in Reformed theology, but it fits like a glove in Catholic theology. Of course, this is why the Reformed persuasion cannot fit Paul's use of David into their theology either. In the end, Protestants don't know whether to claim that David is justified or unjustified, because assuming either position will not jive with their theology. In a word, they can't figure out whether David should be praying the Lord's Prayer or not, so it's safer to say, so they think, that David is teaching others about sin but not teaching himself. END

Interlocutor: As to responding to Sungenis, if we don't address the assumption behind his argument we concede an essential but unstated premise to his argument.

Watch what you say, they'll be calling you...way too VanTillian.

Zrim | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 11:49 am | #

John,

I told you, Jesus did not tell me to pray "The Lord's Prayer." He spoke it to his disciples and followers who as yet had no awareness that he was the Messiah. As such it is perfectly "theologically accurate".

If I'm understanding you correctly, you are saying that the Lord's Prayer is perfectly theologically accurate as a prayer to be prayed by people who do not know that Jesus is the Messiah, but it is not perfectly theologically accurate (and therefore not appropriate) as a prayer to be prayed by people who know that Jesus is the Messiah. Is that your position?

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 11:57 am | #

Bryan, quit being obtuse. Matthew is recording an event in Jesus's life. It is not addressed to me personally.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 11:58 am | #

John,

I'm not trying to be obtuse. I'm trying to understand your position on the proper use of the Lord's Prayer. I understand that you believe that the Lord's prayer is not addressed to you personally. But it seems that you would extend that to all people to whom Jesus was not directly addressing when He taught that prayer to His disciples. Therefore, it seems to follow, given what you have said, that while the Lord's Prayer was perfectly theologically accurate for those who did not know that Jesus was the Messiah, and did not know the gospel, the Lord's Prayer is *not* perfectly theologically accurate and therefore not appropriate as a prayer to be prayed by people who know that Jesus is the Messiah, or at least by people who know the gospel. Is that your position? If not, where do you disagree?

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 12:06 pm | #

Bryan: See Zrim's answer:

the Christian life is one of response to what has been done on our behalf more than some sort of effort to effect something in the present or future. This is no less true when it comes a certain utterance in the Lord's Prayer.

Just as we don't think our daily bread won't come if we don't pray for it, our daily forgiveness (justification) is not dependent upon actually asking for it.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 12:11 pm | #

By the way, you have been very persistent in getting my view on The Lord's Prayer.

You have completely ignored my view of the papacy and justification.

This of course leads me to believe you have some agenda here other than what you state.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 12:13 pm | #

Bryan,

That's just the point!

R. Scott Clark | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 12:14 pm | #

Bryan,

If I might, the answer to your question, I think, turns not on the parties involved so much as the linguistic device being used. The Lord's Prayer is, well, prayer language. It is not civil language, laced with Ps and Q's. As linguistic device, prayer language is by nature petitionary and demanding. I would suggest you are being a bit too literal here.

Zrim | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 12:14 pm | #

John,

the Christian life is one of response to what has been done on our behalf more than some sort of effort to effect something in the present or future. This is no less true when it comes a certain utterance in the Lord's Prayer.

That only takes us back a few steps in the argument. If the Christian life is one of response to what has been done on our behalf, then would the Lord's Prayer be more theologically accurate if that line [in the Lord's Prayer] were changed to "thank you for having forgiven all my sins"? If not, why not?

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 12:15 pm | #

Bryan: Here is the context for "The Lord's Prayer":

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying ..."

keep this in mind as you ask your questions about "theological accuracy".

So, there is no argument involved. It is a hermeneutic that tries to understand Scripture within its context.

Zrim is right: you are being too literal here.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 12:24 pm | #

Zrim,

As linguistic device, prayer language is by nature petitionary and demanding

I thought thanksgiving was also a legitimate form of prayer. If so, then my question still stands: Would the Lord's Prayer be more theologically accurate [for us to pray] if that line in the Lord's Prayer were changed to "thank you for having forgiven all my sins"? If not, why not?

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 12:24 pm | #

I have to get some other things done, and I don't want to hijack Jason's blog. So I'll just summarize my point. It seems that there are only two options:

Either

(1) The Lord's Prayer is not perfectly theologically accurate as a prayer for those who know the gospel, because it implies that their sins have not all been forgiven, when in fact their sins (past, present, and future) were all forgiven at the moment of their initial justification. Therefore the Lord's Prayer should either be improved or not prayed by those who know the gospel.

Or

(2) The Lord's Prayer is perfectly theologically accurate as a prayer to be prayed for those who know the gospel, because our sins (committed after our initial justification) are forgiven on a regular basis through our prayers and use of the means of grace, and so Christ's work on the cross is repeatedly applied to us throughout our lives for the forgiveness of our sins.

If Reformed Christians accept (2), then it seems to me that they are not so different from Catholics in that respect.

In the peace of Christ,

- Bryan

Bryan Cross | Homepage | 01.29.09 - 12:45 pm | #

It seems that there are only two options:

Spoken like a true fundamentalist.

John Bugay | 01.29.09 - 1:11 pm | #

R. Sungenis: Yes, Bryan knows the “fundamentals” of Scripture’s teaching. Salvation is not guaranteed. We must be on guard against sin at every moment. The New Testament is quite clear that we can fall from salvation. John and his Reformed friends only delude themselves into thinking that these warnings apply only to those who are not Christians. There has never been a bigger deception since the devil’s ploy in the Garden of Eden.

END

About the author:



Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D. is the founder of Catholic Apologetics International Publishing, Inc., a non-profit 501-c3 corporation. He holds advanced degrees in Theology and Religious Studies from George Washington University, Westminster Theological Seminary, and Calamus International University, and is presently pursuing a second doctorate at the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham, England. He is the author of many books and articles on religion, politics, science and culture, including: *The CASB, Vol. 5, The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (CAI Publishing, Inc., 2009); *The CASB, Vol. 4, The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-11* (CAI Publishing, Inc., 2009); *The CASB, Vol. 3, The Epistles of Romans and James* (CAI Publishing, Inc., 2008); *The Catholic Apologetics Study Bible, Vol. 2, The Apocalypse of St. John* (Queenship Publishing, 2007); *The Catholic Apologetics Study Bible, Vol. 1, The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Queenship Publishing, 2003); *Not By Bread Alone: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for the Eucharistic Sacrifice* (Queenship Publishing, 2000); *How Can I Get to Heaven: The Bible’s Teaching on Salvation Made Easy to Understand* (Queenship Publishing, 1998); *Not By Faith Alone: The Biblical Evidence for the Catholic Doctrine of Justification* (Queenship Publishing, 1997); *Not By Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (Queenship Publishing, 1997); *Shockwave 2000* (New Leaf Press, 1994). He has appeared on radio and television, including programs on CNN, the BBC and EWTN.