
Practical Theology

John Calvin on the “Double Grace”

According to John Calvin, believers receive from Christ by faith the “double grace” of justification and sanctification. Justification offers imputed purity (in the righteousness of Christ), and sanctification provides actual purity in the life of the Christian.

Calvin defines justification as “the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as righteous men.” He goes on to say that “since God justifies us by the intercession of Christ, he absolves us not by the confirmation of our own innocence but by the imputation of righteousness, so that we who are not righteous in ourselves may be reckoned as such in Christ.”

Calvin and the Reformers regarded justification as a central doctrine of the Christian faith. Justification not only serves God’s honour by satisfying the

conditions for salvation, it also offers the believer's conscience "peaceful rest and serene tranquillity." As Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is the heart and soul of piety. Believers need not worry about their status with God because they are justified by faith. They can willingly renounce personal glory and daily accept their own life from the hand of their Creator and Redeemer.

Sanctification refers to the process in which the believer increasingly becomes conformed to Christ in heart, conduct, and devotion to God. It is the continual remaking of the believer by the Holy Spirit, the increasing consecration of body and soul to God. In sanctification, the believer offers himself to God as a sacrifice. This does not come without great struggle and slow progress. It requires repentance, mortification, and daily consecration.

To separate one from the other is to tear Christ in pieces, or like trying to separate the sun's light from the heat that the light generates. Believers are justified for the purpose of living piously to worship God in the holiness of life.

Joel R. Beeke is a minister in the Heritage Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, and President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, where he is also the professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics. He is author of many books and articles.