



## ***Grace unto Holiness***

Justification by faith, not works, was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation. As is common to sinful people, we get something right, only to get the next thing wrong.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is rightly revered, being Paul's argument in Romans 3:21-4:25. Christians rejoice that it was by grace alone that gave them right standing before God (Eph 2:8-9). Righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ's person and work is a delight...and a relief.

God's elect people were redeemed by Jesus Christ, so that we might be conformed to His image (Rom 8:29). Being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2), along with a heart of stone being transplanted with a heart of flesh is a work of the Holy Spirit (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). Christians are the beginning of a new creation by God (Gal 6:15). We are new creatures, that is, a new man in Christ Jesus, our Lord (2 Cor 5:17). Behold new things have come.

The issue we wish to address is the false notion that once a Christian receives imputed righteousness, she then embarks upon a works-based sanctification. The error of Arminianism is belief in a co-partnership, in the work that justifies the sinner (ie. Jesus does His part by dying on the cross, and the sinner does her part by deciding that Jesus is good enough to save her from eternal damnation).

The error of the legalist is also a belief in a co-partnership, in the work that sanctifies. Jonah reminds us that salvation belongs to the Lord (Jon 2:9). It is God's work to save His people--from election to glorification (Tit 3:5). Every step in between is also His work, be it the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit (1 Chron 16:35; Ps 80:3; Is 25:9).

The creation of a saint, from a sinner, is all Potter and no labor from the clay (Jer 18; Rom 9). A Christian is the object in God's design and execution--forming a holy nation, the church, a people of His own possession (Mt 16:18; 1 Pet 2:9). Saints are being made anew, with holiness being God's intent. For it is written, "be ye holy for I am holy (1 Pet 1:16)." He who began this good work in you will Himself bring it to completion/perfection (Phil 1:6).

The catalyst for creating holiness in the object of God's affection is one's union with Christ (Phil 1:21; Rom 15:18; 2 Cor 11:10; 12:9). The severed branch has no life from the Vine, nor can it decide to attach itself by its own will (Jn 1:13), nor can it grow apart from its Root (Jn 15:5). Life begins when the branch is grafted in by the Vine-dresser's free will and gracious choice. God the Father is the Vine-dresser and Jesus Christ is the Vine (Jn 15:1). The life of God flowing from the Vine to each grafted-in branch is the Holy Spirit bringing the blessings of repentance and faith (Acts 5:31; Phil 1:29), producing fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Holiness in a Christian's life is a product of the Holy Spirit. It is not a self-generated, self-motivated effort to keep the Law or to produce good works, in order to win favor and secure blessings from God. Paul wrote to the Galatians to dissuade such foolishness.



Legalism was plaguing the church at Galatia, even as it plagues many churches, today. The flesh of men lusts after the outward appearance of holiness in others. Christianity becomes a holy show with sinners judging others in the name of being their brothers' keeper.

Legalism invariably leads to despair in those who are not proficient at Pharisaical showmanship. It leads to pride, arrogance, and unwarranted judgmental-ness in those who do legalism well. When the depressed soul finally gives up trying, Legalism leads to lawlessness. This is the Antinomian spirit Paul warned the Colossians to avoid. Legalism and lawlessness feed off one another, spurring one another on, in endless judgments of one another. They are all flesh, and no Spirit of truth.

These problems are rooted in synergistic sanctification ideas, born of man-centered theology. Until men discern that what God requires of them is impossible to perform, in their own wisdom and power, they will fall prey to false teachers who wish to control them. Christian "leaders" also have a corner on the market, when it comes to pleasing God with obedience and good works. They will convince you of that if you buy their books, DVDs, or attend their leadership conferences.

The true teaching of holiness is that it is only the work of the Holy Spirit (monergism). Sanctification is the Holy Spirit, working the truth of God's Word, to grow the saint in grace and knowledge. Christians are purified by the fire of the Holy Spirit and washed by the water of the Word. Again, it is all of God and not by man (Jn 1:12-13).

Union with Christ is the vital doctrine that corrects, even reproves the errant doctrine of sanctification by obedience. The flesh remains weak, but the Spirit is willing and powerfully able to accomplish this good work in which God receives all the glory.

Christian, you must forsake your goals and plans to be a holy member in your local, holy church. The only instrument of your holiness is the Bible, and the only inspiration for you to search the Scriptures is the Holy Spirit, who indwells you (Rom 8:9, 11). He will grow you in grace and knowledge on His timeline and in His purposeful agenda.

The imputation of righteousness came by the Holy Spirit baptizing you, and the same faith which He gave you to apprehend His gracious work in justification, is the same faith that apprehends His gracious work of making you holy and blameless before Him. Rejoice! His promise, for His working for your holiness, is to be believed. It is His grace unto your holiness.

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