

James Montgomery Boice on Romans 8:28–30

Justification and Glorification

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... those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Romans 8:30



Anyone who is involved in a business of any size knows the necessity of a long-range plan. There are one-year plans, five-year plans, and even ten-year plans. The longer these plans are the more often they need to be reviewed, revised, and updated. An executive who can create an accurate long-range plan, foreseeing most of the contingencies that will affect the company in future years, and then keep on top of it, is an extremely valuable asset to his or her organization.

We have been studying a long-range plan, in fact, the longest-range plan that has ever been devised or could be devised. It is a plan that has had its origins in eternity past and will find its consummation in eternity future. It is all-embracing. Everything that has ever happened or ever will happen in history is part of it. And it is utterly certain. So detailed is this plan and so wisely is it drafted that nothing will ever arise to upset it or even cause an alternative plan to be necessary. Of course, I am speaking of the plan of God outlined for us in Romans 8:28–30.

This plan begins with God's foreknowledge and predestination, expresses itself in time in the calling of individuals to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, includes justification, and ends in glorification, when these foreknown and predestined persons are made entirely like Jesus. We are to look at the last two steps of the plan in this study.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

The first term we need to look at is justification, but we do not need to study it in detail here, since it was the chief focus of our study in volume one and has been mentioned many times since.

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. When a person is in a wrong relationship to the law and is condemned or pronounced guilty by the judge, condemnation does not make the person guilty. The person is only declared to be so. In the same way, in

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justification a person is declared by God to be in a right relationship to his law, but not made righteous. In a human court a person can be declared righteous or “innocent” on the basis of his or her own righteousness. But in God’s court, since we humans have no righteousness of our own and are therefore not innocent, believers are declared righteous on the ground of Christ’s atonement.

It helps to realize that the full New Testament doctrine is not merely justification alone, though this is the only word Paul uses in his abbreviated listing of it in Romans 8, but *justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ*.

That definition has four parts.

1. *The source of our justification is the grace of God* (Rom. 3:24). Since “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10), it is clear that no one can make or declare himself or herself “righteous” (v. 20). How, then, is salvation possible? It is possible only if God does the work for us—which is what “grace” means, since we do not deserve God’s working. Paul frequently emphasizes this by adding the words *free* or *freely* to “grace,” which is redundant but nevertheless strong writing.

2. *The ground of our justification is the work of Christ* (Rom 3:25). We saw this in volume one in our discussion of the word *propitiation*. It is because this work has been done that God has been able to justify us justly.

“Justification,” writes John R. W. Stott, “is not a synonym for amnesty, which strictly is pardon without principle, a forgiveness which overlooks—even forgets (*amnēstia* is ‘forgetfulness’)—wrongdoing and declines to bring it to justice. No, justification is an act of justice, of gracious justice.... When God justifies sinners, he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all; he is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself in his Son has born the penalty of their law-breaking.... In other words, we are ‘justified by his blood.’ ”¹

3. *The means of our justification is faith* (Rom. 3:25–26). Faith is the channel by which justification becomes ours. This is not mentioned in the chain of God’s saving actions listed in Romans 8:29–30, but it is the fruit of God’s effectual calling and its result, which is regeneration. When we are born again we show it by repenting of sin and turning to Jesus Christ in faith, believing that he is our Savior.

Two things should be said about faith.

¹ Stott, John R. W. (1986). *The Cross of Christ*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 190.

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First, faith is not a good work. It is necessary, essential. But it is not a good work. In fact, it is not a work at all. Faith is God's gift, as Paul makes clear in Ephesians 2:8–9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

Second, although faith is the means of our justification, it is also the only means. Luther expressed this by the words *sola fide* ("by faith alone"), thus adding a word not present in the text of Scripture but by it nevertheless catching the essence of the idea. Clearly, if faith is not a good work but only receiving what God has done for us and freely offers to us, then it is by faith alone that we can be justified, all other acts or works being excluded by definition. The only means by which any person can ever be justified is by believing God and receiving what he offers.

4. *The effect of our justification is union with Christ.* This idea was developed fully in Romans 5 and in an earlier section of chapter 8. It is the ground of the benefits of our salvation unfolded in Romans 5:1–11 and of our victory over sin elaborated in Romans 5:12–8:17.

Stott explains it this way:

To say that we are justified "through Christ" points to his historical death; to say that we are justified "in Christ" points to the personal relationship with him which by faith we now enjoy. This simple fact makes it impossible for us to think of justification as a purely external transaction; it cannot be isolated from our union with Christ and all the benefits which this brings. The first is membership of the Messianic community of Jesus. If we are in Christ and therefore justified, we are also the children of God and the true (spiritual) descendants of Abraham.... Secondly, this new community, to create which Christ gave himself on the cross, is to be "eager to do what is good," and its members are to devote themselves to good works....

To be sure, we can say with Paul that the law condemned us. But "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."²

HOPE OF GLORY

Glorification, the fifth and final term of Romans 8:29–30, is also a word we have studied earlier. In fact, we met the term as early as Romans 5:2 (which anticipates Rom. 8:28–30), where Paul spoke of Christians as rejoicing "in the hope of the glory of God."

² Stott (1986), 191–192. These four points are outlined by Stott. I discuss them in greater detail in volume one of these studies ("Just and the Justifier," Romans 3:25–26).

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What does Romans 5:2 mean?

It means that we know that one day we will be glorified and that we rejoice in this certainty. That is, we know that we will be like Jesus. He is God and is therefore like God in all respects; we will be like him. We will not become God, of course. But we will become like him in his communicable attributes: love, joy, peace, mercy, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, goodness, self-control and other such things (see Gal. 5:22–23). In that day sin will no longer trouble us, and we will enjoy the complete fullness and eternal favor of God's presence.



When does glorification take place?

There is a sense in which much of it takes place when we die, for then we will be freed from sin, which has taken up residence in our bodies, and will be like Christ. As John wrote, "... we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Yet I am sure John Murray is right when he insists in his treatment of this word that, in its fullest sense, glorification awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of our bodies. In fact, the text in 1 John, which I have just quoted, says this. It does not say simply that "we shall be like him." It says, "*When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*"

Here is how Murray puts it:

1. *Glorification is associated and bound up with the coming of Christ in glory.... So indispensable is the coming of the Lord to the hope of glory that glorification for the believer has no meaning without the manifestation of Christ's glory. Glorification is glorification with Christ. Remove the latter and we have robbed the glorification of believers of the one thing that enables them to look forward to this event with confidence....*
2. The glorification of believers is associated and bound up with the renewal of creation. [This is the teaching of Romans 8:19–22, which we studied earlier. In those verses the glorification of our bodies, which means their resurrection, and the renewal of creation are placed together.]

When we think of glorification, then, it is no narrow perspective that we entertain. It is a renewed cosmos, new heavens and new earth, that we must think of as the context of the believers' glory, a cosmos delivered from all the consequences of sin, in which there will be no more curse but in which righteousness will have complete possession and undisturbed habitation. "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). "And

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there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:3, 4).³

PAST TENSE, FUTURE BLESSING

The most striking feature of Paul’s mention of glorification in Romans 8:30 is that it is in the past (aorist) tense, a fact noted when I first introduced this chain of words three studies back. Since glorification is clearly future from our perspective, this requires explanation.

Some commentators think that here Paul departs from strict accuracy or logic in order to stress the absolute certainty of this future event. That is, it is so assured that it can be spoken of *as if* it were past. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this, writing, “The Apostle’s argument is that, as we know most certainly that we have been called and justified, we can be equally certain of our glorification. Nothing can prevent it because it is a part of God’s purpose for us.”⁴ Likewise Leon Morris: “So certain is it that it can be spoken of as already accomplished. It is in the plan of God, and that means that it is *as good as* here.”⁵

Other scholars call this use of the past tense an aorist of *anticipation* or a *prophetic* aorist, which is almost the same thing. Since God has decreed it, it will happen and can be considered as having happened. Charles Hodge inclines to this explanation when he says, “God ... sees the end from the beginning ... so that in predestinating us, he at the same time, in effect, called, justified and glorified us, as all these were included in his purpose.”⁶

F. Godet is also helpful, though to my way of thinking his explanation is probably not quite what Paul has in mind here. He reminds us that there is a sense in which we have been glorified. That is, our federal head Jesus Christ has been glorified, and we are glorified *in him*.⁷ If this is the case, the verse would be matched by Ephesians 2:6, where Paul teaches that “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” This does not mean merely that taking our place in heaven is a

³ Murray, John (1970). *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 177-179.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, D.M. (1976). *Romans, An Exposition of Chapter 8:17-39, The Final Perseverance of the Saints*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 257-258.

⁵ Morris, Leon (1988). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, and Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 333, 334.

⁶ Hodge, Charles (1972). *A Commentary on Romans*. Edinburgh, and Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 286. (Original edition 1935)

⁷ Godet, F. (1892). *Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, trans. A. Cusin. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2:113. Public Domain.

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future certainty but that we have actually already been seated in heaven in the person of Christ. The only reason I say that in my judgment this is not what Paul has in mind here is because in Romans there seems to be a flow from eternity past to eternity future, the middle portion of which dips into time. Paul seems to be describing something that began in the past, has affected us in the present, and will carry us into the future.

If we must make a choice among these three interpretations, I would side with either or both of the first two.

Yet it may be—I think I prefer this—that the chain simply moves back into eternity at this point. We have seen that it begins in eternity and then dips down into time. The flow of the verses would be most satisfying if the chain simply moved back into God’s timeless eternity once again, glorification being spoken of as past because it is indeed past (or eternally present) in the mind of God.

WHAT ABOUT SANCTIFICATION?

As I close my detailed discussion of these specific terms, I want to ask a question that is also raised by Lloyd-Jones in his exposition—wisely, I think. It concerns the one obvious omission in this list: sanctification. Why is sanctification not included, particularly when it is supposed by many to be the central theme of Romans 5 through 8?

I have already addressed myself to the latter part of this question, namely, whether Paul *is* discussing sanctification in these chapters. I did that at the beginning of this volume, arguing that it is not Paul’s purpose to discuss sanctification at all, though much of what he says necessarily touches on it. He is arguing the case for perseverance or eternal security, which is why he introduces the phrase “hope of glory” as early as Romans 5:2. That is the central and important theme, and it comes back at the end, in Romans 8, which is what we are studying now.

But that is not a full answer to the question.

Why not?

Well, Paul has not been discussing foreknowledge, predestination, or effectual calling in these chapters either, yet he mentions those terms here. If they are included, why not sanctification? Again, the apostle is unfolding the flow of salvation from the decrees of God in the past to our glorification in eternity future. Isn’t sanctification an indispensable part of that flow? Isn’t it as necessary and certain as the other items?

Why, then, is sanctification omitted?

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Here are the reasons Martyn Lloyd-Jones offers.

1. *Sanctification is not part of the argument Paul has in mind at this point.* Paul is focusing on the acts of God for our salvation, and his point is that our salvation is certain because it is God who is thus acting. Our security depends upon what he has done, not on what we may or may not be able to do. To put it in other words, our security in Christ does not depend upon our sanctification. Eternal security is not the anticipated outcome of some process. Sanctification is a process while these other items are divine acts. From the point of view of Paul's argument in Romans 8, these are entirely different things.

2. *Sanctification is an inevitable consequence of justification.* Therefore, Paul does not need to mention it. As soon as a person is called by God and is justified, in that same moment sanctification begins. This is because of regeneration or the imparting of a new nature to the saved person. There is no justification without regeneration just as there is no regeneration without justification. So the one who is justified, who now also possesses a new nature, will inevitably show that new nature by beginning to live a new life. That is why we can say that a claim to justification apart from growth in holiness is presumption.

3. *Sanctification is inevitable also from the standpoint of our glorification.* Indeed, it is a preparation for it. To go back to the text I cited toward the beginning of this study, I note that when John, writing of glorification, says "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," he immediately adds, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). In other words, it is the assurance of our glorification that spurs on our sanctification.

What the great Welsh preacher gets out of this (rightly, in my opinion) is that the proper way to teach sanctification is not by concentrating on "me," "my feelings," or certain steps to "personal holiness," but rather on what God has done for us. That is, the proper approach to sanctification is to fix our eyes on God and our minds on the great biblical doctrines.

How do most people teach sanctification today? Either it is by methods ("These are the steps; do this, and you will become holy"), or it is by experience ("What you need is a special filling of the Holy Spirit [or tongues or whatever]").

This is not the biblical pattern. As Lloyd-Jones says:

The way to preach holiness is not to preach about "me" and "my feelings" and to propound various theories as to how I can be delivered; it is, rather, to preach justification and glorification. By so doing you will include sanctification. Such is the Apostle's method—"whom he justified, them he also glorified." It is because

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certain people do not know the truth about justification and glorification as they ought that they are defective in their teaching about sanctification. A man who has his eye on his future state of glorification will spend his time in preparing himself for it.⁸

Suppose you are invited to a party by the President of the United States. If you are normal, you would take some time to get ready, choosing a special dress or suit and making whatever other special preparations might be necessary. In the same way, the fact that we are going to be with Jesus Christ and be like him should influence our behavior and life choices.

When I was teaching on Romans 6:2 and 11, explaining how it is that we have “died to sin,” I said that we have died to it in the sense that we have died to the past. And I developed a slogan: *You cannot go back; there is no place for you to go but forward.*

That is absolutely true, of course. We cannot go back. The eternal purpose of God in saving us, unfolded in the five great acts of God described in Romans 8:29–30, makes that plain. But just as it is important to say that we cannot go back, so is it also important to say that we *are* going forward. God’s foreknowledge of us is followed by his predestination of us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. His predestination of us to be made like Jesus is followed by our being called to saving faith. Our calling is followed by our justification. Our justification is followed by our glorification. Therefore, it is as certain that one day we will be with Jesus, and be completely like Jesus, as it is that God exists and that his long-range plan is realistic, effective, and unchangeable.

This is God’s great plan. So let’s get on with our part in it and be thankful that his grace has drawn us in.⁹

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⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1976), 261.

⁹ Boice, J. M. (1991–). *Romans: The Reign of Grace*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2:935-942.