

Obedience, Justification, and Sanctification

by Bruce T. Forbes, 1995 & 2013

The gospel in its plainness and beauty was taught to both Adam and Eve before and after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. They were even baptized! On the occasion of their baptism, the Lord taught them many important principles, including Free Agency, the Atonement, and how to gain Salvation. He also commanded them to teach their children these things.

Therefore, I give you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying: That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so become of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory; For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified . . .

And now, behold, I say unto you: This is the plan of salvation unto all men, through the blood of mine Only Begotten who shall come in the meridian of time. (Moses 6:59-60,61; Genesis 6:61-63,65, Inspired Version)

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. (1 John 5:4–9)

By water we keep the commandments (we are obedient), by the Spirit we're justified, and by the blood we're sanctified. This is a concept that would truly puzzle many Christians! But to the humble seeker who realizes the path to heaven is not contained in a single concept, there is no confusion. They realize these are but steps in becoming like our Father in Heaven.

By the Water We're Obedient

“OBEDIENCE is the first law of heaven, the cornerstone upon which all righteousness and progression rest. It consists in compliance with divine law, in conformity to the mind and will of Deity, and in complete subjection to God and his commands. To obey

gospel law is to yield obedience to the Lord, to execute the commands of and be ruled by him whose we are.” (Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, pg. 539)

Two great things occurred in conjunction with the creation of this earth: First, God gave laws (or ‘commandments’) so that His spirit children would have a guide to follow and learn from in becoming like Him. Next, these spirit children were given agency to act for themselves - “Free Agency” - to obey or disobey, thus proving whether they are worthy of all the Father has (see Abraham 3:24-26).

One great purpose of this mortal life is to test our obedience to our Heavenly Father.

Baptism is the gateway to eternal life; it puts us on the path that will lead us back to our Heavenly Father. It is the ‘sign’ God has ordained for use by His children to signify that they are willing to follow and obey Him. Without this simple expression of our faith, all other actions we take to put our life in compliance with Deity are in vain.

The symbolism of the act of baptism is important to understand. We are ‘buried’ unto death, meaning that the ‘old’ person is now dead; the person that sinned and disregarded the word of God is no more. As we rise up out of the water - as we are ‘reborn’ - we become a new creature; we are a creature clean from the sins of the world and willing to follow God in all things. Consider the words of Paul to the Romans:

“ . . . How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us are baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead [to sin] is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:2-11; note added is the Inspired Version.)

Baptism is the sign, or symbol, which shows we are willing to follow God. Following our baptism, we must live our life in compliance with His laws. If we do, we’ll receive the promised blessings. If we don’t, we’ll not only receive no blessings, but we’ll receive any promised punishment:

“There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundation of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated - And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” (Doctrine & Covenants 130:20-21)

Justified by the Spirit

The LDS Guide to the Scriptures defines Justification as:

To be pardoned from punishment for sin and declared guiltless. A person is justified by the Savior's grace through faith in Him. This faith is shown by repentance and obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Jesus Christ's Atonement enables mankind to repent and be justified or pardoned from punishment they otherwise would receive. (Guide to the Scriptures, Justification, Justify)

Imagine you're standing before the great judgment bar of God. Your life is passing before you as you prepare for judgment. Finally it's your turn, and you step up to the table where the books are opened and you are judged. You know you'll be judged by the actions you took while in mortality. You realize there is no way you could possibly pay the massive debt transgression, sin, and mistakes have brought upon you, and you are grateful beyond words for Christ's atonement.

Christ is there, acting as mediator between God and man:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus . . .
(1 Timothy 2:5)

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

. . . he shall make intercession for all the children of man; and they that believe in him shall be saved. (2 Nephi 2:9; see also vs. 10)

. . . giving the Son power to make intercession for the children of men . . . (Mosiah 15:8)

. . . Even as many as have believed in my name, for I am Christ, and in mine own name, by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them. (Doctrine & Covenants 38:4)

Christ will, if you're worthy, testify that He has in fact taken upon Himself the debt to God you could not pay alone. The judge will then nod and turn judgment of your case over to Christ - he who has bought you with a price and has set the terms for repayment. Now He is your judge - He will determine whether or not you are worthy of His grace.

"I need a witness that you have been faithful to the terms I have set," Christ may say, "I need evidence to justify the price I have paid in your behalf." You know that you have lived according to Christ's commands; that your actions give adequate grounds for Christ to consider the debt paid; that your actions justify His atonement on your behalf. But your word alone won't be enough. Again the books may be opened - the books which the Apostle John saw in which the dead, great and small, will be judged according to the things that are written in the books - according to their works while in mortality. (See Revelation 20:21-22).

One more witness will step forward. The Holy Ghost will testify of the acts that he has approved of as being righteous and eternal - these are the acts that he has ratified, or 'sealed':

An act that is sealed by the Holy Ghost is one that is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, or in other words, ratified and approved by the Holy Ghost. This law of justification is the provision the Lord has placed in the gospel to assure that no unrighteous performance will be binding on earth and heaven, and that no person will add to his position or glory in the hereafter by gaining an unearned blessing. (McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, pg. 408)

Thus our justification before God is twofold: First, our salvation will be justified by the grace, mercy, love, and goodness of God - to be specific, it will be through the atonement of Jesus Christ. His suffering to pay the price for our sins will justify the fact that the punishment for those sins has been dealt with.

Secondly, our salvation will be justified through the faith we have and the actions we take based on that faith in meeting the terms Christ has set in order for His atonement to take effect in our life. Our salvation will depend on our obedience to the commandments - not to our 'faith without works', but to our 'faith with works'.

Sanctified by the Blood

The LDS Guide to the Scriptures defines Sanctification as "*The process of becoming free from sin, pure, clean, and holy through the Atonement of Jesus Christ (Moses 6:59-60).*"

The goal of all righteous men and women in all ages has been and will be to become pure and free from the sins of this world. Helaman tells us of such persons in his day; that they -

. . . did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God." (Helaman 3:35)

Two modern men of God have explained this process of sanctification:

. . . it consists of overcoming every sin and bringing all into subjection to the law of Christ. God has placed in us a pure spirit; when this reigns predominant, without let or hindrance, and triumphs over the flesh and rules and governs and controls as the Lord controls the heavens and the earth, this I call the blessing of sanctification . . . (Brigham Young, JOURNAL OF DISCOURSES, 10:173; quoted from DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS STUDENT MANUAL, Salt Lake: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1981), pg. 41)

To be SANCTIFIED is to become clean, pure, and spotless; to be free from the blood and sins of the world; to become a new creature of the Holy Ghost, one whose body has

been renewed by the rebirth of the Spirit. SANCTIFICATION is a state of saintliness, a state attained only by conformity to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. (McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, pg. 675)

The command recorded in the scriptures is to “*sanctify the Lord God in your hearts*” (1 Peter 3:15); to “*purge yourself of sin*” (Doctrine & Covenants 43:11). If we do this we become a pure vessel, “*meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work*” (2 Timothy 2:21).

Two things are needed before the Holy Ghost can enter into us and make us into a new creature. First, we must obey the law of Christ. By our obedience we prove to Deity that we are striving to become holy beings. Secondly, as we are worthy we receive the blessings of the atoning sacrifice of Christ - His Grace will make us holy.

After we have obeyed the commandments and received a measure of grace into our lives, God our Eternal Father can, through His servant the Holy Ghost, purge our souls of all uncleanness, making us new creatures to whom evil and wickedness are foreign things. Alma tells us that -

. . . they, after being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceeding great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:12)

Those who are sanctified will receive an inheritance in the presence of God. But even the sanctified person must continue to endure and keep the commandments! Even these holy men and women can fall from the level of Grace they have attained.

And we know that all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ, and worship the Father in his name, and endure in faith on his name to the end, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God. And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true; And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God will all their mights, minds, and strength.

But there is a possibility that man may fall from grace and depart from the living God; Therefore let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; Yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also. (Doctrine & Covenants 20:29-34)

Surely great men of the gospel like Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, David Whitmer, and others had received the blessings of sanctification. And yet a simple study of church history will show that they were not continually faithful - they did not receive the blessings of the sanctification they once had because they fell away from the gospel. Oliver Cowdery did return to the fold, but others didn’t; Sidney Rigdon even joined with several of the apostate sects which propagated after the death of the prophet Joseph Smith.

The prophet-historian Moroni, in concluding his record, almost seems to summarize the entire plan of salvation with these words:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves all ungodliness;

and if ye shall deny yourselves all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind, and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32-33)

CHART: Moses 6:58-62 and 1 John 5:4-9

THERE ARE THREE THAT BEAR WITNESS IN HEAVEN:

THE FATHER God the Father our Heavenly Father	THE WORD Jesus Christ Only Begotten Son of God in the Flesh	THE HOLY GHOST the Comforter the Holy Spirit
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THERE ARE THREE THAT BEAR WITNESS ON EARTH:

WATER Baptism; by this we keep the commandments	BLOOD the Atonement by this we are sanctified	SPIRIT Holy Ghost through Him we are justified
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*By these three elements we came into the world.
By them we are redeemed from the world, for by them we bear record of our faithfulness.*

IN THE SCRIPTURES WE LEARN THAT WE ARE 'SAVED' THROUGH:

FAITH in the Lord Jesus Christ	GRACE including the atoning sacrifice of Christ	WORKS (Actions) our obedience makes his atonement effective in our life
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WE CAN BRING ABOUT THIS SALVATION THROUGH THE PRINCIPLES OF:

FAITH by this we follow Christ	HOPE in Christ hope that His sacrifice will save us from mortality; that He will grant us Eternal Life	CHARITY our actions prove our Faith and Hope and justify the price Christ paid to redeem us
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THE REWARDS OF SUCH BELIEFS AND ACTIONS ARE:

OBEDIANCE we prove to God and Christ that we are obedient to their word	JUSTIFICATION our thoughts, words, and deeds justify the price Christ paid for us, and they justify our returning to our Father's Presence and receiving the promised reward	SANCTIFICATION we become pure souls in the pursuit of all things righteous
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