

Salvation: What and When?

In this key chapter – and it is a key chapter for my thesis – I want to answer those two questions, two questions which, on the surface, seem elementary. But don't be fooled! There's much more to 'salvation' than might appear at first glance.

So then, these two very important questions – the What? and the When? of salvation. It is, I say, vital that we are clear on both. Why? Because, as I said at the close of the previous chapter, the Judaisers were asserting that 'unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' (Acts 15:1). As I admitted, I doubt they fully understood all the ramifications of their teaching when they spoke of 'salvation', but, by the Spirit, Paul did! At least, as I have noted, he saw enough to disturb him, disturb him deeply. The law-men argued that without the keeping of a specified part of the law there could be no salvation. Paul smacked the ball straight back into their court: going back to the law is not only a mistake; no shilly-shallying: such a step would be an offence to Christ and his Spirit. And, grasping his arguments, we ourselves need to be on the *qui vive* about the issue. The apostle, surely by the Spirit, in accordance with Christ's promise (John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:1,4,12-15), could pierce through the smoke and mirrors, and discern what the false brothers' teaching would lead to – not just what it *could* lead to. Indeed, what it would lead to was already staring him in the face, both in Corinth and Galatia. Because of the law-teaching that they were listening to, and because they were buying into that law-teaching, believers were deserting the true God, lowering Christ, believing a different gospel – a false gospel – and going back into slavery and all the misery that entails. When the *pseudadelphoi* got to work, however tiny or innocuous their first step might appear,¹ or, indeed,

¹ As seemingly small sins can cast long and deep shadows, so seemingly small, barely-connected events and decisions today can

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however specious both they and their teaching might seem,² salvation – salvation in its entirety – was at stake, whether or not they themselves understood it all. Now the law-men were using underhand methods, working with stealth and deception. I guess they were smart, and kept things very close to their chest. But Paul was not fooled. He saw what was going on. And he spoke up. He wasn't going to join the three wise monkeys,³ seeing no evil, hearing no evil, speaking no evil; that is, to change the figure, he was no ostrich.

have large effects tomorrow. In 1939, Gustave Bertrand, a French member of the group of Poles, French and English cryptanalysts secretly working on the German code machine, Enigma, suggested leaking false information to the Germans: namely, that the group had cracked the German system (which they had not). His thought was that this might make Hitler pause before invading Poland. Wiser counsels prevailed. If the allies had engineered that leak, as an unintended consequence, almost certainly the Germans would have changed (greatly tightening) their coding system, Ultra might never have been successful, and the outcome of the Second World War been very different. See Ronald Lewin: *Ultra Goes To War: The Secret Story*, Penguin Books, London, 1978, pp40-41. Even more critical, Edward Halifax turned down the opportunity to become Prime Minister in May 1940, even though Neville Chamberlain, the Royal Family and the overwhelming number of Tories wanted him and not Winston Churchill to take over. Churchill, in defiance of massive odds and setbacks, survived to lead the country to victory. Halifax, almost certainly, would have appeased Hitler, allowing the dictator to crush Russia before annihilating Britain.

² I remind you of Paul's words to the Colossians (see the context for the connection with law-teaching): 'If [that is, since] with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations – 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used) – according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh' (Col. 2:20-23).

³ A Japanese maxim. 'See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil'. In other words, turn a blind eye, look the other way, go along with the pretence, and, above all, don't blow the gaff.

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He was blunt in exposing the blatant hypocrisy of the lawmen, and their detestable motive:

For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh (Gal. 6:13).

But, of course, it was their doctrine that was the real issue. And that was an attack upon salvation itself.

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Salvation. What is salvation? When is a sinner saved?

Ask me another! That's easy! When the sinner trusts Christ and is united to him by faith, that's when he is justified, saved. At the point of faith: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will saved' (Acts 16:31). This, I imagine, is the answer which would satisfy many – assuming that they could rise to even that theological level of understanding!

Salvation, however, is far more nuanced than that. As an abundance of scriptures teach, Christ saves from sin in that he delivers the sinner from the penalty of sin, the pollution of sin, and the very presence of sin: salvation is redemption from sin's penalty, power or pollution, presence. The deliverance from sin's penalty is complete at the point of the sinner's justification by faith; the deliverance from sin's polluting power is life-long in the saint's progressive sanctification; the deliverance of the child of God from sin's presence is at death leading to the return of Christ and the believer's entrance into the everlasting fullness of the kingdom.⁴

We can go even further: the elect sinner is saved in eternity in God's decree, he is saved by Christ's finished work on the cross and in his resurrection, he is being saved by the continual intercession of Christ in heaven, and in his own, personal, progressive sanctification in the Spirit, and he will be finally and ultimately saved at the return of Christ, his

⁴ See my *Undervalued*.

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resurrection, the judgment and his entrance into the fullness of the kingdom of Christ.⁵

I think we would all agree that it was in his letter to the Romans that Paul set out the fullest and clearest exposition of salvation. And of course it was necessary for him to do that because – surprise, surprise – the *pseudadelphoi* – or at least, their doctrine – had reached Rome. But more of that later. For now, we need to grasp the doctrine of salvation as set out by Paul in that letter.

All natural men need saving because they are sinners, sinners by birth and by practice. As sinners, born sinners, they are born under God's wrath (Ps. 51:3-5; Rom. 1:18 – 3:20; Eph. 2:1-3). Salvation is the great essential.

Salvation. Where to start? Let me begin, as Paul did:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith' (Rom. 1:16-17).⁶

These two verses play a vital role in Paul's Romans' run-in with the *pseudadelphoi*. Let me prove it.

As Lloyd-Jones said, we must always ask questions of the Bible:

You have to question your text, to put questions to it, and especially this question: What is this saying? What is the particular doctrine here, the special message?⁷

⁵ See my *Eternal* and my 'Fourfold Justification' in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume Three*.

⁶ I pay tribute here to my American friend, Rick Peterson, who first stimulated me into study of this whole topic. Furthermore, as I was 'completing' the mss, Rick drew my attention to the part played by Rom. 1:16-17.

⁷ D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Preaching and Preachers*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1972, p76.

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Yes, indeed. We must always put such questions to Scripture: Why did Paul, for instance, say that? Why did he say it at this time? Why did he say it in this way? The particular questions here are these: Why did Paul say: ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel’? And what did he mean by it?

‘Not ashamed’? Paul used a strong, intensive word for ‘ashamed’, shame with the idea of fear, fear of putting a stopper on something. Paul was not ashamed: fear was not going to stop him; he was not going to play the shrinking violet and hold back, even though – and this is the point – even though he would be under immense pressure to pipe down and keep his thoughts to himself.⁸ Of course, as so often with apostle, he was using a *litotes* – a deliberate, ironic, understatement; he intended to convey the opposite impression. Paul was not going to be ashamed; no, he would stand up and stand out and glory in, boast in, proclaim, the gospel. Nothing – and no one – would stop him doing that! He wasn’t going to be muzzled.

Well... who might put pressure on him? Who would laugh at him for preaching the gospel of Christ? Any amount of people would call him a fool (1 Cor. 4:10)! And worse. They would not be above spreading lies about him. Or mocking him, accusing him of hypocrisy (2 Cor. 10:1-2), of acting tough on paper but folding up when confronted (2 Cor. 10:10). And even in preaching, he was pretty mediocre (2 Cor. 11:6), they claimed. Any weapon would do to destroy him and his reputation. ‘We are treated as impostors’, he said (2 Cor. 6:8).

Not only did the *pseudadelphoi* stoop to personal attacks; they criticised – even parodied – what he taught, putting words in his mouth, and then bashing the man of straw they had constructed. As he told the Romans, he had to put up with false accusation: ‘Why not do evil that good may come? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their

⁸ Compare the way most men around Hitler feared to tell him unpalatable truth. If they spoke up, they knew they would probably be shot. Or worse. So they played safe and stayed buttoned-up.

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condemnation is just' (Rom. 3:8). And I think that when the apostle said: 'What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?' (Rom. 6:1), he was probably quoting a slanderous accusation which had been made against him and his doctrine.

Following his conversion, he preached Christ in Damascus. What kind of reception did he get? This:

When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple (Acts 9:23-26).

As he told the Thessalonians:

The Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets... drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved – so as always to fill up the measure of their sins (1 Thess. 2:14-16).

And, having been arrested by the Romans, but allowed to address the Jewish mob in Jerusalem, he declared;

When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple... I... saw [Christ] saying to me: 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me'... 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles'. Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said: 'Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live' (Acts 22:17-22).

As he told Agrippa:

I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping

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with their repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me (Acts 26:19-21).

No holds were barred to his critics:

They say: 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account' (2 Cor. 10:10).

Oh yes, plenty of people had it in for Paul, and would leave no stone unturned to destroy him. The Jews, for a start, would like to ruin him. The Greeks would. But, as he explained in detail to the Corinthians, he would not be cowed by Jew or Greek. He publicly revealed his mind, using the bluntest and boldest language:

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart'. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men... God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God... And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided [determined] to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

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Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory... No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned...

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God... So let no one boast in men... (1 Cor. 1:18 – 3:23).

Well, that left nobody in any doubt!

But the point is that Paul was attacked not only by Jews and pagans, but by Judaisers, the law-men, the *pseudadelphoi*. If he was prepared to attack their doctrine, they would pay him back! Indeed, they were prepared to strike first! And I suggest that whoever else was in his mind here in Romans 1:16-17, the law-men were. He was not going to yield. He would stand his ground, and maintain the gospel of Christ, however much ridicule was heaped upon him, whatever personal abuse was dished out to him. As we have seen, ridicule he would meet. He would be looked-down on, even despised. And he knew it. After all, the law-men had originated – where? At Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29), especially from the company of James (Gal. 2:12). James, at this time, carried huge weight (Acts 21:17-26), and Jerusalem, of course, was the original *ekklēsia* (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:1 – 8:1). And, despite James' statement in Acts 15:13-21, as I have explained elsewhere, it appears that James

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had a problem over the law.⁹ All this gave the law-men *kudos*, clout; they had important backers. It was the old-boy network in action; it's not what you know, but who. But Paul refused to buckle:

To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) – those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me (Gal. 2:5-6).

We can so easily run away with the notion that Paul was popular in his day, as popular as he now is among evangelicals. Not so! He was far from being the flavour of the month! His works would not be have been listed on 'The Book of the Month' list, or given as 'Editor's Choice'. Few, if any, would have put his work forward as worthy of a prize. He was often in a minority, and it was not unknown for him to be in a minority of one. Hence the importance of his remark to the Romans, coming so early as it does in his letter to them, and setting the tone for the rest of what he intended to say:

I am not ashamed of the gospel

He wasn't whistling in the dark:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for...

At a high-level meeting of the EEC¹⁰ in Brussels in the early 70s, the British Foreign Secretary, Jim Callaghan, deliberately put his foot through diplomatic protocol to make a point in Britain's favour. Sir Michael Butler, the Permanent Representative, wholly unused to such behaviour, became desperate, even frantic. He shouted for Roy Hattersley, a minister under Callaghan, to come and help: 'Minister! Minister! Come quickly. The Foreign Secretary has gone off

⁹ See my 'Does Acts 21 Confirm Sabbath Keeping for Believers?' in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume Eleven*.

¹⁰ European Economic Community.

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his head'. Hattersley was able to reassure Butler by quoting from memory some words of Michael Foot:

The Right Honourable Member for Cardiff South [that is to say Jim Callaghan] always does everything on purpose.¹¹

How much more true and apt this is for Paul the apostle. He always did things and said things with a purpose. He had solid reasons for his boasting. 'For...', he declared. And so he was off... And once the sluice had opened, the truth poured out of him, hot – molten metal.

As I have already said, the *pseudadelphoi* were leading believers to desert the one and only gospel and take up with a false gospel. It was for this reason, the evidence of the rest of the letter more than suggests, that the apostle used Romans 1:16-17 as a springboard to launch into a massive exposition of the gospel – the fullest and clearest in all Scripture – in process of which he had a great deal to say about the law, and the part it does *not* play in salvation – *in any part of it*.

Look at the apostle's emphasis on the gospel:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed

The *pseudadelphoi* were saying that salvation, that righteousness, comes only by the law. Not so, retorted the apostle. It comes only by Christ, by the gospel. And that's why he was not ashamed of the gospel. As he would later tell the Romans:

Gentiles [that is, those outside the old covenant (Eph. 2:11-12)] who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel [that is, those in the old covenant] who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based

¹¹ Roy Hattersley: *Who Goes Home? Scenes from a Political Life*, Little, Brown and Company, London, 1995, pp155-157,219-220.

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on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; and whoever believes in him [Christ] will not be put to shame’ (Rom. 9:30-33).

[The Jews] being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own... did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says...: ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says: ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 10:3-13).

And do not miss the apostle’s emphasis in Romans 1 upon Jew and Gentile:

To the Jew first and also to the Greek

This, of course, would be one of Paul’s major themes in Romans. On my count, there are over thirty references to ‘Gentile’ or ‘Greek’ or ‘nation(s)’ in the letter. See, in particular, Romans chapters 2, 9, 11 and 15 – chapters, please note, not proof texts!

And, whatever the precise meaning of some of the phrases, do not miss Paul’s stress upon faith (as opposed to works):

For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith...: ‘The righteous shall live by faith’

And, finally, notice the emphasis upon living:

‘The righteous shall live by faith’

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Interestingly, the NIV rendering of Galatians 1:6 lays heavy stress on this very point:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel (Gal. 1:6).

This is the sole rendering that I know of which stresses ‘called... to live in the grace of Christ’ as opposed to ‘called... by the grace of Christ’ or somesuch. Even so, it is, as I say, an interesting choice.

Be that as it may, ‘live’ was Paul’s point in Romans 1:16-17.

The blurb for sermon 3023 by Lloyd-Jones (on Romans 1:16-17) says this:

What is salvation? Christians may use this word out of context and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones discusses what the Bible means by the terms ‘being saved’ and ‘salvation’. Romans 1:16-17 is filled with meaning regarding what happened as a result of the fall of humanity. In the sermon ‘God’s Great Plan for Salvation’, Dr Lloyd-Jones conveys that the Christian has a three-fold deliverance from sin through the power of salvation: deliverance from the guilt of sin, the power of sin, and the pollution of sin. Dr Lloyd-Jones goes on to explain that salvation also has an implication of time: the Christian has been saved, is being saved, and will be saved. Paul glories in this because it emphasises his point that he is not ashamed to preach this message of reconciliation and deliverance. This gospel applies to both the Jews and the Gentiles, those who followed the law and those who did not, and it shows that all have hope in Christ by grace through faith. Christians were previously under the wrath and destruction of God, but salvation restores them again in the hope of glory.

As Lloyd-Jones said in that discourse, if we grasp Romans 1:16-17 it will save a great deal of explanation as we read on in the letter. All the leading points of Paul’s letter are bound up – in seed form – in those two verses.

In this glorious chain of salvation, in the believer’s actual experience, justification – a once-for-all act of God –

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precedes, and inevitably and leads to, progressive sanctification – an essential, life-long process. That is the teaching of Romans.

And not only Romans: ‘And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in his sight’ – that is, justification – ‘if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel’ – that is, progressive sanctification (Col. 1:21-23). The link between the two is unbreakable:

For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).¹²

¹² The link between justification and progressive sanctification was one of the bones of contention between the Anabaptists and the Reformers. The latter taught the inevitable link between the two, but practice did not always go hand in hand with theory. Luther, for instance, though he rightly emphasised justification by faith, failed to give enough weight to progressive sanctification as essential evidence of it. I have already noted his misunderstanding of Galatians. This inevitably spilled over into his attitude to the letter of James, leading to its dismissal as so much hay or straw. In general, Anabaptists rightly demanded progressive sanctification as evidence of justification – so much so, the Reformers falsely labelled them with the stigma of perfectionism; Calvin, repeatedly so. As for the Anabaptists, there is abundant testimony as to their godliness of life. They insisted on it. Although the Reformers tried to dismiss the Anabaptists, they longed that their own churches might be as spiritual. Luther, envying the Anabaptists’ godliness, admitted his followers lived as badly as Papists. He coped with it by saying doctrine (light) and life have to be distinguished, thus providing a pragmatic excuse for his followers – with dire consequences. Although I have introduced this historical note, the issue cannot be relegated to the mists of history; it is with us today. Reformed teachers (covenant theologians) rightly argue that justification and progressive sanctification cannot be separated, but when it comes to

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And quoting those verses from Ephesians reminds me of the obvious. It would not be far from the mark to say that the first three chapters of that letter spell out justification and the last three spell out progressive sanctification – all in one letter, with no break, written to one people in the first instance, and now applicable to all.

The way to salvation is through holiness (progressive sanctification); no holiness, no salvation:

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness [progressive sanctification]¹³ without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

‘Strive’ is not a word to associate with justification, is it? Pure progressive sanctification is the issue here! And James is explicit:

If anyone thinks he is [careful about external observance] and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s [external observance] is worthless. [True spirituality – DG] that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world (Jas. 1:26-27).

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?... So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say: ‘You have faith and I have works’. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well.

the believer and the law they often – always, I might say – break their rubric. See my *Battle; Christ*. After they had given up their struggle to reform the State Church, trying no doubt to ease a troubled conscience, much Puritan preaching – so often praised to the sky by the Reformed – was designed, by heavy doses of the law, to try to turn the conforming infant-baptised unconverted into true believers. See my *Infant*. See also my ‘Glass Eyes and Wooden Legs in 17th Century New England or: A Warning to Infant Baptisers’ on my sermonaudio.com page and in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume Eight*.

¹³ See my *Fivefold*.

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Even the demons believe – and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says: ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’ – and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead (Jas. 2:18-26).¹⁴

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom (Jas. 3:13).

Peter no less so:

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11).¹⁵

[Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness (1 Pet. 2:24).

Take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the

¹⁴ For more on the necessity of progressive sanctification, see my *Fivefold*.

¹⁵ For more on this, see my *Assurance*.

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grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:17-18).

‘Make every effort’ and ‘grow’ are clearly speaking of progressive sanctification.

Scripture teaches that regeneration leading to conversion produces a change that *is* obvious, a change in life that *must be* obvious:

We were buried therefore with [Christ] by [spiritual] baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

‘Walk’ does not refer to justification; it is nothing other than progressive sanctification. As Paul put it:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17).

Old what? New what? At the very least, the ‘old’ must be referring to the old way of life, the life lived pre-conversion, and the ‘new’ to the life lived post-conversion, life in the Spirit.¹⁶ By conversion, the sinner is taken out of Adam and brought into Christ. He had an ‘old man’, he now has a ‘new man’; he was an ‘old man’, he now is a ‘new man’. Paul spelled it out:

If [that is, since] we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self [that is, old man] was crucified with him in order that the body of sin

¹⁶ When I met some American Fundamentalists in London, they had just come in from a spell of door-to-door evangelism, and were reporting a number of conversions, and rejoicing (even crowing) over it. I questioned them. They would never meet these people again, they owned, but were sure they were converted: they had said ‘the prayer’. (It might, I thought, have been that the householders had simply wanted to get rid of what they regarded as a nuisance interrupting the sport they were watching on TV). I asked about 2 Cor. 5:17. ‘Oh’, they assured me, the householders had new lives, changed lives – ‘they have said the prayer’!

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might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:5-6).

...assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self [that is, your old man], which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self [that is, your new man], created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:21-24).

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self [that is, old man] with its practices and have put on the new self [that is, new man], which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:9-11).

Hence, thinking of the Judaisers' teaching:

In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love... Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

'Working' – who wants to apply this word to justification? Without a doubt, 'faith working through love' must be talking about progressive sanctification.

There is no question of it: progressive sanctification is not an option. Without it, no salvation. Let these words sink in:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?... So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (Jas. 2:14).

It is an absolute axiom of the new covenant: no fruit of the Spirit? No salvation. I remind you:

If [since] you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not

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inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:18-24).

As James put it in an ironic, if not sarcastic, challenge to his readers, both then and now: ‘Show me your faith apart from your works’ (Jas. 2:18). ‘Go on! Try it! I defy you!’ It can’t be done! Without good works, without progressive sanctification, without transformation of life, no salvation. ‘Faith apart from works is dead’ (Jas. 2:26). Judgment will be a judgment of works, whether the works have matched the profession (Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 12:36; 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12).

This is not salvation by works in the sense of justification by works, but it is the scriptural doctrine that justification always shows itself by works, and must always show itself by works. Faith, not works, is the means of justification, but works are the inevitable – and essential – fruit:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognise them by their fruits... You will recognise them by their fruits (Matt. 7:15-20).

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit (Matt. 12:33).

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn-bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:43-45).

Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a

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grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water (Jas. 3:11-12).

And the letters of John could be summarised as: 'No obedience? No justification!':

By this we know that we have come to know [Christ], if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes (1 John 2:9-11).

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).

Everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him (1 John 2:29).

Everyone who... hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that [Christ] appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother (1 John 3:3-10).

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Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him (1 John 3:18-19).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:2-3).

...not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning – that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works (2 John 5-11).

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God (3 John 11).

I don't see how it could be clearer.

An excursus into Hebrews

Even though the letter was not written by Paul, Hebrews has an important contribution to make to what I am saying. Hence this excursus. As I have noted, strictly speaking the writer of that letter was not dealing with the *pseudadelphoi* – at least, I can see no evidence of it. As I have said, the *pseudadelphoi* arose as a reaction to the conversion of Gentiles; Hebrews is concerned with the apostasy of Jewish believers, *their*

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defection from Christ.¹⁷ But though they may, as it were, circumnavigate in opposite directions, both sets of protagonists – and their errors – end up at the same point; namely, the adulteration of the new covenant by the old; which inevitably means the ruin of the new covenant. And, as Paul so bluntly told the Galatians, this spells disaster – the replacement of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one and only true gospel, with a false gospel, and the lowering of Christ. Consequently, Hebrews, which has more than any other canonical book to say concerning the new covenant and its supersession of the old, has a great deal to tell us about what the writer called ‘such a great salvation’ (Heb. 2:3) accomplished by Christ who is ‘the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him’ (Heb. 5:9). Although the definite article has to be supplied, it *has* to be supplied. The writer was plainly referring to Christ as the one, the only one, who saves: he is ‘*the* source of eternal salvation’. All is in keeping, of course, with Christ’s own assertion (John 14:6), later preached by Peter (Acts 4:12). Christ, ‘securing an eternal redemption’ for his people by his propitiating sacrifice – ‘by means of his own blood’ (Heb. 9:12) – ‘having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him’ (Heb. 9:28), and thus bring in their everlasting bliss.¹⁸ In saying this, the writer indicated that one of the main ways in which he would accomplish his purpose of holding these Jewish believers to the new covenant was to set out a full exposition of salvation.

¹⁷ He writes to prevent this by setting out the superiority of the new covenant over the old. He takes the elements of the old – land, sabbath, tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifice, altar, and argues that Christ is the fulfilment, the reality of them all. He takes the old-covenant characters (or pre-old-covenant characters) – prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, Melchizedek, Aaron – and shows Christ to be superior to them all. ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11).

¹⁸ See my *Undervalued*.

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Even the briefest of skims through the book makes it evident that for the writer of Hebrews the ‘great salvation’ embraces far, far more than justification; at the very least, it also embraces progressive sanctification and glorification. And do not miss my ‘at the very least’. When he was speaking of ‘salvation’, the writer spread his net to the fullest extent to include salvation’s announcement in the preaching of Christ (Heb. 1:1-4) – later completed by apostolic revelation (Heb. 2:3) – its accomplishment by the sacrificial death of Christ (Heb. 1:3; 2:9-10,14-17; 9:12-28; 10:12-14; 13:12) to deliver his people from slavery (Heb. 2:16), his maintenance of them in this state of salvation by his endless, constant, peerless, effective intercession on their behalf (Heb. 6:17-20; 7:23-28; 8:1-2; 9:24), the sanctification of believers (Heb. 2:11; 6:1-12; 9:14; 10:10,14; 13:12), their perseverance (Heb. 1:14; 2:1-4,18; 3:6; 4:1-16), and Christ’s glorious return (Heb. 9:28), all of which – and more – is incorporated in the ‘new order’ (Heb. 9:10) – that is, the better, superior, new covenant which has superseded the inferior old covenant (Heb. 7:18-28; 8:6-13; 10:1-18). Let me stress the obvious: these things are not disjointed, isolated packets standing on a supermarket shelf calmly awaiting selection by the finicky customer; they obviously overlap and interplay with each other. They are interlocking. You cannot have one without all the rest. Indeed, in a very real sense, that is the fundamental point I am making. ‘Salvation’ encompasses all aspects of redemption, every part of it, all linked in an indissoluble bond, beginning with God’s electing decree and leading inevitably to the saint’s glorification in Christ’s kingdom at the resurrection (Rom. 8:28 – 11:36). And all is combined into the new covenant which – unlike the old covenant which was temporary¹⁹ – is the fixed, permanent, unchanging and unchangeable covenant in Christ.

No wonder, then, that the writer of Hebrews would not allow his readers even to think of going back to the superseded, old covenant. Similarly, Hebrews enforces Paul’s vehemence

¹⁹ See my *Three*.

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against the *pseudadelphoi* for their efforts to contaminate the new covenant by the old. Both writers, blessed with a clearness of vision, saw the writing on the wall. And it was just one word which stared them in the face: ‘DISASTER!’

We must never skip the warning passages by which the writer of Hebrews applies the new covenant. Application was key to him, and so it must be for us.²⁰ So serious and searching are these warnings in Hebrews, it is not unknown for commentators to gloss them so as to avoid their clear – but painful – implication. What a cheap, grievous way to treat the writer’s effort to maintain the glory of Christ in the new covenant! These warnings, of course, have an obvious application for unbelievers, but – and we must never allow ourselves to forget it – the writer issued them in the first instance to believers, and for believers. And one way of looking at their thrust is this: Christ has established the new covenant, rendering the old obsolete. He has brought in his own, new law. So, in terms of the wineskins, don’t go back to the obsolete, worn out, tired, old leather. The consequences of getting this wrong are not to be played with. So said the writer to the Hebrews.

The writer had hardly got out of the starting blocks before he sounded his first warning note:

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? (Heb. 2:1-3).

This is patent: if the old-covenant warnings were so serious, how much more so must be the warnings of the new?

²⁰ As William Perkins, the arch-Puritan preacher, said to all preachers: ‘What’s the use of it?’ Setting out doctrine, good; applying that doctrine, better. Better? No! Best of all, essential.

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Even with the passage of 2000 years, we can still feel the passion pounding in his heart; it leaps off the page across those two millennia: the writer was not in the Senior Common Room of the local theological seminary, holding a sedate, refined debate, discussing, in a detached way, some nice, abstruse, esoteric theoretical issue over a cup of coffee. Oh no! He was engaged in a spiritual battle, a life-and-death battle, a battle he had to win. He was fighting for the souls of men.

As he had begun, so he continued:

We are [God's] house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as [the Jews did] in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said: "They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways". As I swore in my wrath: "They shall not enter my rest"'.
Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today', that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end (Heb. 3:6-14).

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it (Heb. 4:1).

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience [as the Jews displayed in the wilderness]. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,

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Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (Heb. 4:11-14).

This 'rest' must not be confined to justification, done and dusted. Nor to the intermediate state.²¹ Nor to eternal glory. The use of 'strive' in 'strive to enter that rest' and 'to him to whom we must give account' proves that we have moved on from justification to include progressive sanctification and perseverance, *even to the day of judgment*.

The writer pressed on with his argument, the bit now firmly between his teeth:

It is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Heb. 6:4-6).

And then we get this, clearly speaking of progressive sanctification, the living out of the justification wrought for the elect by God, and, once again, with an eye to the judgment day:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of

²¹ See my *Undervalued*.

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fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said: 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay'. And again: 'The Lord will judge his people'. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:19-31).

The writer was in full flow:

You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For: 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him'. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls (Heb. 10:34-39).

Wise teacher that he was, the writer then (in Hebrews 11) reminded his readers (ex Jews, remember) of the heroic saga they all knew so well, the long history of countless men and women of faith who had lived and died in the days before the coming of the Messiah and the new covenant. Nobody could miss what he was saying. Yes, these men and women were men and women of faith, but for each and every one of them, their faith was shown in a lifetime of works and obedience. There was no exception. In a new-covenant sense, their justification by faith, in every case, was demonstrated by a life of works done in faith; in short, their justification inevitably led to their progressive sanctification and perseverance. If the writer – who said this:

...You have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is

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unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Heb. 5:11-14)...

...had lived until the twentieth century, he would never have allowed cheap talk about ‘once saved, always saved’, or: ‘I’m only a carnal Christian’.²² For him, progressive sanctification and perseverance was as vital as justification. No works? No justification!

He resolutely pressed home the obvious application:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [the testimony of the believers listed in Hebrews 11], let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

And that ‘cloud of witnesses’, remember, lived in the days of the old covenant, before the Spirit had been poured out!²³ The

²² An excuse offered by those who try to justify their talk of Christ being their Saviour but not their Lord. In other words, they turn Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthians on its head to make it a compliment, an explanation, a justification! ‘I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says: “I follow Paul,” and another: “I follow Apollos”, are you not being merely human?’ (1 Cor. 3:1-4). ‘Flesh’ and ‘spirit’, once again.

²³ ‘Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said: “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified’ (John 7:38-39). The new covenant might well be described as the age of the Spirit (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:5,8; 2:1-4; 4:31; Gal. 5:16-25, and so on).

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implication is clear: a better covenant enables – and demands – a better devotion. Above all:

Consider [Christ] who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 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. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears (Heb. 12:3-17).²⁴

Believers are not under the old covenant and its law. No! They are in Christ, under his law. As the Hebrews writer put it to his readers: You are no longer living in the shadow of Sinai (Heb. 12:18-21):

²⁴ That is, he couldn’t change his choice.

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...But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:22-24).

Consequently:

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven... Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:25-29).

All this change, the fulfilling of the old covenant, the bringing in of the new, came only at tremendous cost to Christ, a cost believers must never let slip from their minds:

Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb. 13:12-16).

In particular, Hebrews addresses progressive sanctification. It is clear that the writer could never for a moment have contemplated that anybody could dream of treating justification and progressive sanctification as separate entities:

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses... We are his

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house, if [and, I might add, only if – DG] indeed²⁵ we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope... Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end... Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it... Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 3:1 – 4:16).

His virtually closing remarks put the icing on his cake:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

Just before I close this excursus, let me, at the risk of boring you by repetition, make my purpose as clear as I can. I am anxious to press home the point that ‘salvation’ is far more than justification. In particular, ‘salvation’ includes progressive sanctification, leading to glorification. It is vital to grasp this principle and not let it go – not least when we come

²⁵ The ‘indeed’ surely makes the point I added in my parenthesis.

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to the closing chapters in this book. In this work, I am looking at the way Paul dealt with the *pseudadelphoi*, but not as an academic study of a historical spat, but as enforcing a biblical principle which we need to understand and apply today. And in that important task of contemporary application, nothing could be more necessary than to make sure we allow no daylight whatsoever between justification and progressive sanctification leading to glorification. That has been what this excursus has been about.

Before we move on, let me illustrate what I am saying by an episode (or two episodes in one) drawn from the old covenant. We know that Israel was delivered from Egypt by means of the Passover:

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ‘This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household... You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it... It is the LORD’s Passover’ (Ex. 12:1-11).

The spiritual equivalent in the new covenant is obvious: it is the elect sinner’s deliverance from sin, death and slavery by the sacrificial, atoning work of Christ, the imputation of the merits of his blood and righteousness to all who believe:

Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed [for us] (1 Cor. 5:7).

You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

For our [that is, believers’] sake he [that is, the Father] made him [that is, the Son] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in

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him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ was crucified on the Feast of Passover:

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him: ‘Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?’... And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives... And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together... Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified (Mark 14:12,26,53; 15:15).

Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour [Pilate] said to the Jews: ‘Behold your King!’ They cried out: ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered: ‘We have no king but Caesar’. So he delivered him over to them to be crucified (John 19:14-16).

We know that Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was with the intention of settling them in the land God had promised to Abraham. We also know that Israel initially failed in this (Numbers 13 & 14). But, after a generation of judgment in the wilderness, Israel, once again, came to Canaan, and this time they were obedient and successful (Joshua 1 – 5). In accordance with God’s command, Israel set up twelve stones drawn from the bed of the Jordan to commemorate the miracle:

The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And [the] twelve stones, which [at God’s command (Josh. 4:1-7)] they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. And he said to the people of Israel: ‘When your children ask their fathers in times to come: ‘What do these stones mean?’ then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground’. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all

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the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever' (Josh. 4:19-24).

Scripture draws special attention to the date:

While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho (Josh. 5:10).

The coincidence of dates of the Passover and the crossing of the Jordan, and their memorials, is no accident. I use the term strictly – that is, co-incidence:

With a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt... When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you... (Ex. 13:9-11).

Clearly, God was teaching the Israelites – and us today – an important spiritual truth.²⁶ While it goes without saying that Israel could not leave Egypt and enter Canaan in one physical act on the same day, even so, spiritually speaking, Israel's leaving Egypt and entering Canaan was one. Whatever Canaan is taken to typify – the believer's present rest in Christ, or his eternal bliss – the new-covenant meaning and fulfilment of the old-covenant shadow of the dates and memorials is patent. 'Salvation' is one event, one happening: from election to glorification, 'salvation' is one; it must not be chopped into bits, and treated as free-standing, independent, isolated entities. In particular, we must constantly keep justification and progressive sanctification in one intimate, unbroken union with each other.²⁷ That is my point. Can a sinner be justified but show no evidence of progressive sanctification? Of course not. And surely nobody would suggest that progressive sanctification is possible without justification!

²⁶ Any who think I make too much of it should read Num. 14:34.

²⁷ For more on this, see my 'Memorials 1' and my 'Memorials 2' on my sermonaudio.com page.

The chapter resumed

Justification is by grace, through Christ alone, by faith alone, yes, without a shadow of doubt, but that faith is never alone, it is never merely notional.²⁸ If it is, it is dead. And dead faith – however vehemently it may be professed, however doctrinally or theologically orthodox it may be according to the received wisdom of the favoured Confession or Catechism in vogue – that faith is not saving. Yet many who are truly justified seem to want to shunt justification into a nice little box and mark it as the crown jewel, ‘the one thing needful’ in the matter of salvation. It would be closer to the mark, however, to give the chief role jointly to justification and progressive sanctification. *Justification does not stand on its own as the one and only essential.* Progressive sanctification is also an essential – to bear witness to the justification professed.

Indeed, progressive sanctification – not justification, not the profession of justification – but progressive sanctification in the believer’s life – is the only evidence of a believer’s salvation to others.²⁹ As I have argued, justification as justification cannot be detected by others. James rightly demanded evidence of the salvation claimed by the man who kept talking about his faith: ‘Prove it to me!’, he exploded. Faith is ‘completed, made perfect’ by progressive sanctification (Jas. 2:22), and only by progressive sanctification. It is only by progressive sanctification in the professor’s life that others can find the evidence of his regeneration leading to justification by faith. Talk of justification is not enough. It must be accompanied by progressive sanctification, visible progressive sanctification. Progressive sanctification is not a luxury, an add-on, an option, an incidental; without it, no salvation! And that progressive sanctification must be referring to what is taking place today; it is not some one-off act fifty years ago!

²⁸ See my *Secret*.

²⁹ To self, it is the witness of the Spirit, backed by the evidence of progressive sanctification – see my *Assurance*.

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I am not alone in saying this.

Four Reformed (or Reformed-sympathisers') testimonies

C.H.Spurgeon had strong words for teachers who sounded a muffled tone on this matter:

It is a very great fault in any ministry if the doctrine of justification by faith alone be not most clearly taught. I will go further, and add, that it is not only a great fault, but a fatal one; for souls will never find their way to heaven by a ministry that is indistinct upon the most fundamental of gospel truths. We are justified by faith, and not by the works of the law. The merit by which a soul enters heaven is not its own; it is the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am quite sure that you will all hold me guiltless of ever having spoken about this great doctrine in any other than unmistakable language; if I have erred, it is not in that direction.

At the same time, it is a dangerous state of things if doctrine is made to drive out precept, and faith is held up as making holiness a superfluity. [Progressive] sanctification must not be forgotten or overlaid by justification. We must teach plainly that the faith which saves the soul is not a dead faith, but a faith which operates with purifying effect upon our entire [being],³⁰ and produces in us fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. It is not by personal holiness that a man shall enter heaven, but yet without holiness shall no man see the Lord. It is not by good works that we are justified, but if a man shall continue to live an ungodly life, his faith will not justify him; for it is not the faith of God's elect; since that faith is wrought by the Holy Spirit, and conforms men to the image of Christ. We must learn to place the precepts in their right position. They are not the base of the column, but they are the capital of it. Precepts are not given to us as a way to obtain life, but as the way in which to exhibit life. The commands of Christ are not upon the legal tenor of 'this do and live', but upon the gospel system of 'live and do this'. We are not to be attentive to the precepts in order to be saved, but because we are saved. Our master

³⁰ Original 'nature'.

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motive is to be gratitude to him who has saved us with a great salvation.³¹

John MacArthur:

God did not design to justify us and glorify us and be indifferent about what's in the middle. He ordained that, and for that he ordained [progressive] sanctification and manifest good works, that before the foundation of the world he determined we would walk in them, so that every true believer is being [progressively] sanctified, has been justified, will be glorified, is being [progressively] sanctified. That is a mark of a true believer... Now, why am I so concerned about this? Well, if nothing else, because it's true, and because it's critical. But beyond that, I am concerned about it because it's just not an issue in contemporary evangelical Christianity. [That is, practical holiness comes low on the agenda for most evangelicals]. Holiness, godliness, [positional and progressive] sanctification, obedience, separation from sin, separation from the world – those were very common themes in the history of the church, always there. Preachers preached often on holiness, virtue, fleeing sin, fleeing the world. They preached calls to salvation, and then to the saved they preached calls to holiness. The truth of [progressive] sanctification through the history of the church has been dominant, and it should be dominant because it is the dominant reality in the Christian experience.

Yes, it's great to celebrate the doctrine of election. It's great to celebrate... the truth of justification. It's marvellous to anticipate the glory of heaven. But we live in the realm of the operating doctrine of [progressive] sanctification, and it once was central to the life of the church. There were expectations about how you lived and how you thought and how you talked and how you conducted yourself to honour the Lord. There were continual calls to love the Lord and to be obedient to his word out of that love.

That's not true anymore. The truth of [progressive] sanctification, the truth of holiness, godliness is disappearing from popular Christianity. In some cases it's gone.³²

³¹ C.H. Spurgeon sermon 1029.

³² John MacArthur: 'The Primary Importance of Sanctification', Grace To You website.

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Donald S. Whitney:

[Positional and progressive] sanctification alone doesn't save, but there is no salvation without it. As Paul told the Thessalonian believers: 'God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through [positional] sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth' (2 Thess. 2:13).³³ The experience of salvation begins with regeneration and justification, continues with [progressive] sanctification, and is fulfilled in glorification. All who are regenerated and justified are being [progressively] sanctified. All who are being [progressively] sanctified will eventually be glorified. While we may distinguish between regeneration, justification, [progressive] sanctification, and glorification, we must not separate them. In other words, the person who truly experiences one will experience them all (and in the order listed).³⁴

John Gill commenting on 'After that you have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you' (1 Pet. 5:10):

God will make his people 'perfect': and which respects not their justification; for in that sense they are perfect already in Christ, their Head, who has perfectly fulfilled the law for them, and fully expiated their sins; has completely redeemed them, and procured for them the pardon of all their trespasses; and has justified them from all their iniquities: but [it means] their [progressive] sanctification; for though all grace is implanted in them at once, yet it is gradually brought to perfection... There is a perfection of holiness in Christ, who is their sanctification, but not in themselves; for every part of the work of grace is imperfect, as faith, love, knowledge, and so on, and sin dwells in them, and they stand in need of fresh supplies of grace; and even the best of them disclaim perfection, though they greatly desire it, as here the apostle prays for it; and which shows that, as yet, they had it not, though they will have it hereafter in heaven, where there will be perfect knowledge, and perfect holiness, and perfect

³³ Whitney seems to be confusing positional and progressive sanctification here. See my *Fivefold; Positional*.

³⁴ Donald S. Whitney: 'What role does sanctification play in salvation?', 9Marks website.

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happiness... The people of God are in a safe and established state and condition already; they are in the arms of everlasting love, and in the hands of Christ, and in a sure and inviolable [new] covenant,³⁵ and are built on the rock of ages; and are in a state of grace, of justifying, adopting, and sanctifying grace, from whence they can never finally and totally fall; and yet they are very often unstable in their hearts and frames, and in the exercise of grace, and discharge of duty, and in their adherence to the doctrines of the gospel; and need to be established, and to have a more firm persuasion of their interest in the love of God, and a more steady view of their standing in Christ, and the [new] covenant,³⁶ and a more lively and comfortable exercise [of] grace in him, and a more constant discharge of duty, and a more firm and closer adherence to the truths and ordinances of the gospel; and they will have a consummate stability in heaven, where are sure dwelling places.

* * *

Salvation involves both justification and progressive sanctification. They must not be separated. This was a key issue in Paul's dealing with the *pseudadelphoi* with their cry; 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' (Acts 15:1). Their mingling of the covenants was calamitous.

* * *

Did the early *ekklēsia* learn from Paul, see his earnestness, get the point, and stand firm when confronted by their own *pseudadelphoi*? The record of Revelation 2 & 3 is not very encouraging. These chapters give us a helpful snapshot of how things developed – and developed quickly – in the early days of the new covenant. We have Christ's own assessment of how things were turning out. Only one *ekklēsia* in Asia Minor was commended for standing against false teaching (Rev. 2:2), while almost all of them received Christ's rebuke for

³⁵ Gill had 'covenant of grace'.

³⁶ Gill had 'covenant of grace'.

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their defective progressive sanctification (Rev. 2:4-5,14-16,20-23; 3:1-3,15-20). As if that wasn't enough, Christ knew 'the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan' at Smyrna (Rev. 2:9), and he was also fully aware of 'those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not' at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:9). Whoever Christ was referring to, it is surely not too much of a stretch to let our minds go to the Judaisers, the *pseudadelphoi*, Paul's midges. There is a good chance that the midges were infesting the seven *ekklēsia* of Asia Minor.

Let me return to Romans 1:16-17. Let me quote it once more:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written: 'The righteous shall live by faith' (Rom. 1:16-17).

One of the points I flagged was the apostle's use of 'live' in his quotation of Habakkuk 2:4; namely: 'The righteous [or, the just, the justified] shall live by faith'. This could be translated: 'The just by faith shall live'. The apostle quoted it again in Galatians 3:11, and the writer of Hebrews quoted it in Hebrews 10:38-39. Clearly, such men saw the text as a major contribution to the gospel, the new covenant, and to try to defend it against any attempt to pollute it by imposition of the old covenant. And with good reason, for it undeniably links justification and progressive sanctification, and as the writers argued, neither are by the law.

Gill justly commented on the verses:

A just or righteous man is not everyone who thinks himself, or is thought by others, to be so; nor are any so by their obedience to the law of works; but he is one that is made righteous by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, which is... revealed in the gospel. The life which this man lives, and 'shall live'... [denotes] a spiritual life, a life of justification in Christ, of holiness from him, of communion with him, and of peace and joy; which spiritual life shall be continued, and never be lost. The manner in which the just

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lives is 'by faith'... for faith, when given by God, and exercised by the believer, is his own, and by it he lives; not upon it, but by it upon Christ the object of it; from whom, in a way of believing, he derives his spiritual life, and all the comforts of it.

In 2002, Moo got close, but not close enough. He was somewhat weak, failing to do justice to Paul's (and Habakkuk's) use of 'live':

Moral righteousness [that is, progressive sanctification], as Paul makes clear in Romans 6, inevitably must follow upon forensic righteousness [that is, the Reformed view of justification]. But the two are not the same, and [this surely ought to be 'but' – DG] the legal standing precedes the transformed lifestyle [and inevitably leads to it – DG].³⁷

But he had struck a more confident note in an earlier work on Romans, when coming, after some debate, to this:

Paul in Romans 1 – 8 consistently links faith with righteousness (*cf.* the summary in Romans 5:1) and shows how 'life' is the product of righteousness (*cf.* Romans 5:18 and 8:10). These connections favour the translation 'the one who is righteous by faith will live'.³⁸

At this point, Moo cited Charles A. Anderson Scott with approval. Scott's words carry immense weight for my present purpose. When you bear in mind that the Judaisers were saying that no circumcision meant no salvation, and Paul's response in Romans was to link 'salvation', 'justification', 'progressive sanctification', and 'life in the Spirit', and link them in an indissoluble bond, and all without law, the point scarcely needs any emphasis from me. Here is the actual quotation from Scott, but for an extended version of it, see 'Scott on Life as Salvation' in the Appendix:

³⁷ Douglas J. Moo: *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Exposition*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2002, p47.

³⁸ Douglas J. Moo: *...Romans*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1996, p78.

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‘To live’ or ‘life’ is used as equivalent for ‘to be saved’ or ‘salvation’. The most general, but at the same time the most pregnant, word for participation in salvation is ‘life’... ‘Life’ was for [Paul] synonymous with salvation in its positive aspect...³⁹

Life – as defined by Paul in Romans – is equivalent to salvation, and all is by faith, and not by law.

Thomas R.Schreiner, after a thorough and detailed discussion of the context of Romans 1:16-17, made a very important comment on the text:

I conclude that the term ‘righteousness of God’ is both forensic and transformative’.⁴⁰

Schreiner honestly admitted that ‘I have changed my mind several times on this question... I have slowly become convinced, however, that transformation is involved’.⁴¹

I cannot overstate the importance of Schreiner’s conclusion. It could not dovetail more exactly into the point I have been making at length in this chapter. The Reformed, in particular, and evangelicals, in general, too often think of justification merely and entirely as a forensic matter – a question for lawyers and courtrooms – and have dismissed those who have argued that justification is more than a declaration, high-handedly writing off such percipient believers as antinomians.⁴² But this costs the accusers more than the

³⁹ Charles A.Anderson Scott: ‘The Christian Conception of “Life”’ leading to ‘The Principle of Life’ in ‘Salvation as a Progressive Experience’ in *Christianity According to ...Paul*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1932 (but several editions 1927 – 2009), pp136-141.

⁴⁰ Thomas R.Schreiner: *Romans*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 1998, p66.

⁴¹ He spoke of his previous writings showing signs of his wavering. I, too, have to confess my dilatoriness in seeing progressive sanctification in Rom. 1:16-17. As my friend Rick pointed out, it has taken us 500 years! Why?

⁴² See my *Four*.

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accused. A justified sinner is righteous; he is not merely declared or accounted so. And that righteousness shows itself – must show itself – in life-long transformation into Christ’s likeness by the Spirit, leading them to eternal glory. Hence Galatians 5:13-25. In particular, as Paul would tell the Romans:

Those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom. 8:28-29).

To be ‘predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers’ clearly speaks of transformation into Christ’s likeness – progressive sanctification! And all in the context of the weakness of the law (Rom. 8:1-4), with dogmatic, extended assertions that the believer is not under the law, but in and under the Spirit (Rom. 6:1 – 8:39).

And that takes us to the next chapter. Because I have been so adamant that justification *and* progressive sanctification are essential for salvation, it does not mean that I undervalue justification. Justification is an essential aspect of salvation. What role does the law play in securing that justification? That is the issue here. The *pseudadelphoi* were making their position clear. It is time to look at how Paul blew their teaching to smithereens. And then we shall have to look at progressive sanctification, because as this chapter has shown, progressive sanctification is also an essential aspect of salvation. Now what part does the Mosaic law play in the believer’s progressive sanctification? That will be the issue in that chapter. The *pseudadelphoi* would have had no doubt about the answer to that! But what did Paul say?

First things first, though: justification.