CHAPTER SIX

'Union with Christ' and Sanctification

Paul Wells

Relating union with Christ to sanctification presents a dual challenge. Firstly, the scope of both subjects is very broad. It embraces both the person and work of Christ and new life in Him from its inception to its heavenly conclusion. Secondly, the absence of a biblical-theological emphasis on either or both subjects creates false expectations regarding Christian living.

A distorted view or neglect of the biblical doctrine of union with Christ will lead to a drift away from New Testament fundamentals. Individualism that forgets the corporate and covenantal perspectives of union with Christ is the blight of western evangelicalism. Furthermore, when the centrality of union with Christ is absent from the understanding of believers, the link between the history of salvation and the order of salvation is eclipsed. The resulting subjectivism tends to look for the assurance of salvation in experiences.

Shifting the focus to sanctification, another set of issues arises. For over two centuries evangelicalism has spawned holiness movements that range from forms of legalism to downmarket mysticism. 'Mistakes about holiness however sincere', as J. I. Packer reminded us, 'will lock one into unreality and strain in

175

a way that destroys either the joy or honesty of one's inner life, or perhaps both together.'[1] The consequences are far reaching. Such mistakes lead to attitudes of judgmentalism, self-satisfaction and spiritual pride, as well as 'love-only' antinomianism or the legalism that are the eczema of evangelical churches. Some of the most draining conflicts in the church arise because of false spirituality.

It is just as important to strike a biblical balance with regard to union with Christ and sanctification as with Christ and justification. Sanctification has to have its proper place as a *sine qua non* for every believer as the work of God, no less than justification. We forget all too easily that even the regenerate, and we ourselves, are devious and rebellious at heart and, as such, are never free from the lure of sin, particularly in a day when sin is trivialised.

1. Biblical Sanctification or Performance Holiness?

The formal structural issues raised by these subjects generate questions of their own in different ways, but should not cause us to overlook the central material problem regarding holiness itself. Is there not a distance between modern understandings of *holiness* and biblical *sanctification*?

Packer also wrote, in 1984, that 'holiness is a neglected priority throughout the modern church generally' and 'a fading glory in today's evangelical world'.[2] He seemed to suggest that holiness is a known quality and that its demise is regrettable. However, is it not legitimate to ask whether the ideas of holiness current in the context of the modern post-romantic world marked by the optimistic progress of humanism, individual self-fulfilment, rampant liberalism and western cultural superiority do not themselves produce unhealthy attitudes? Until the rise of the

---

1. J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press 1984), p. 122.

2. ibid., p. 99.

charismatic movement, which has replaced one version of holiness with another, holiness-talk took over the field formerly occupied in Protestantism by the biblical sanctification of reformed and puritan theology, which was of another ilk, simply because holiness was discussed in the context of the *ordo salutis,* against a backdrop of covenant theology and the centrality of Christ's office as mediator. Isolated from this matrix, holiness assumes another meaning, more often than not either Arminian or sacramental.

The following argument will propose that it is beneficial to be more circumspect in our way of speaking about holiness. Even if holiness and sanctification translate the same Greek word (*hagiazo*), they do not have the same meaning or a conflated meaning, nor are they inter-changeable. The difference between holiness and sanctification is brought out when the mediating concept of righteousness (and the role of God's law) is introduced between the two. This will allow us to situate theologically not only the difference between holiness and sanctification but also between justification and sanctification as works of a holy God.

To put it more concretely: when we sing 'only Thou are holy, merciful and mighty', we confess that there is no holiness outside the holy Trinity. In Christ one person of the Trinity became incarnate and suffered for us,[3] so manifesting the unique holiness of God in the flesh and establishing righteousness for the ungodly. It is only through restoration to righteousness in Christ that we can be associated in any way with divine holiness and consequently be sanctified in union with Him. Without the intermediating step of 'Christ our righteousness', we have no part in holiness, but through Christ's righteousness we are sanctified and called to live consecrated to Him. In other words, our sanctification is only and ever a derivative and dependent God-graced holiness, never complete in this life, resting on union with Christ.

---

3.   cf. R. Letham, *Union with Christ, In Scripture, History and Theology* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing 2011), p. 32.

Commenting on the *Heidelberg Catechism* (q.60), 'God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and *holiness* of Christ', A. Kuyper stated: '*Sanctification* and *holiness* are two different things. Holiness, in the 60th question, has reference, not to personal dispositions and desires but *to the sum total of all the holy works required by the law.* Sanctification, on the contrary, refers not to any work of the law, but exclusively to the work of *creating holy dispositions in the heart.*'[4] Note, sanctification is God 'creating' holy dispositions, not us obtaining them by spiritual gymnastics. If, when we enter glory, we do so with Christ's imputed righteousness and holiness, during our earthly pilgrimage we enjoy sanctification, the divine renewal of holy dispositions of heart that foster obedience and service.

We will explore briefly, in what follows, this distinction between holiness and sanctification in the context of union with Christ. The main interest of this approach is that when sanctification is considered as the gracing of holy dispositions in union with Christ's righteousness and holiness, God is honoured as the author of salvation in sanctification as much as in justification. Any separation between justification and sanctification that 'divides Christ' and leaves us to 'satnav' our sanctification through seeking and getting holiness, is revealed for what it is – an incipient synergism that will inevitably lead to uncertainties and frustrations or to hypocritical dissimulation. Yet a common misunderstanding of holiness based on a performance mentality seems to prevail: God justifies us but we have to 'work out our own salvation' by becoming more holy. However, if it is down to us to 'let go and let God', we will soon be taking over and not letting God, because He is not a smooth enough operator for our liking. We will be in danger of hiding the reality in the pious language of divine guidance.

As B. B. Warfield commented in his discussion of the 'Higher Life' movement: 'The correlate to a free salvation is trust; the correlate to a conditional salvation is performance. Trust and

---

4.   A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1969), pp. 453–4, (italics are Kuyper's).

performance are contradictions. A 'Do' religion and a 'Trust' religion are irreconcilable. . . We cannot look to ourselves for the decisive act in our salvation and at the same time be looking to God for all.'[5] G. C. Berkouwer as well indicated the tendency in pietism to abstract sanctification from faith and justification:

> The renewal is not a mere supplement, an appendage, to the salvation given in justification. The heart of sanctification is the life which feeds on this justification. There is no contrast between justification as an act of God and sanctification as an act of man. The fact that Christ is our sanctification is not exclusive of, but inclusive of, a faith which clings to him alone in all of life. Faith is the pivot on which everything revolves. Faith, though not itself creative, preserves us from autonomous self-sanctification and moralism.[6]

These comments point to the fact that by seeing the order of salvation in holiness-righteousness-sanctification, we may also avoid both the legalism and antinomianism that rear their heads so frequently in this context. Union with Christ in sanctification will always lead back to Christ as mediator, over against all naturalistic religion and philosophical idealism.[7] There are *no* 'holy men' and there is no moral *summum bonum* outside of Christ. Is not this what Jesus Himself meant when He said, 'Outside of me you can do nothing' (John 15:5)?[8]

In addition, and perhaps most important, the *person* of Christ as mediator will be recognised as central in the whole soteric process, not only in His life and passion as the author, but also in His ascended ministry as the One who sanctifies and completes salvation (*teleioten*, Heb. 12:2). So it will remain in glory.

After briefly (ii) defining the terms, we will consider: (iii) righteousness and holiness in Adam and Christ as the context

---

5.   B. B. Warfield, *Works,* VIII (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1982 [1932]), p. 555.

6.   G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1952), p. 93.

7.   E. Brunner, *The Mediator* (London: Lutterworth Press 1934), chs I–II.

8.   Unless otherwise shown biblical quotations are from the ESV.

of sanctification in the covenant of grace; (iv) definitive sanctification in Christ as the status of believers; (v) transformative sanctification as lifestyle and (vi) the tension in the struggle for sanctification that precedes final glorification with Christ.

2. Mediation, Union with Christ and Sanctification

It is a reflection on our modern mindset that holiness is generally thought of in terms of individual progress, and I fear that this presentation will hardly be sufficient to break that mould. However, sanctification in Christ is a cosmic reality and the classic reformed *ordo salutis* presents an all-englobing movement of which the death and resurrection of Christ are the wellspring. The destination is the new creation into which no defilement will enter (Rev. 21:27). In this movement 'precisely by electing, calling, justifying, sanctifying and glorifying particular people, the triune God is drawing mere individuals in their subjectivity into a historical drama of cosmic proportion. As individuals . . . they become part of the new creation. . . a redeemed humanity.'[9] If the message of the New Testament does concern the salvation of individuals, this is because they are caught up in a cosmic movement in which the creation itself, the church and believers, all await the consummation of Christ's kingdom. As a body, the church grows into Christ as the 'fullness of him who fills all in all' and all reality, natural and historical, is placed under Christ to that end (Eph. 1:23). The order is cosmic, corporate-ecclesial and personal, and in talking about the individual we should not forget that the context is the corporate renewal of creation.[10]

---

9.   M. S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation. Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2007), p. 36. Horton ably criticises the 'new perspective on Paul' for playing down the centrality of the universal aspects of sin and redemption in Romans.

10. As J. Webster indicates in the structure of his book, *Holiness* (London: SCM Press 2003), which talks about the holiness of God, of the Church and of Christians in that order.

2.1 Key concepts

This movement is rooted in the mediatorial function of the second person of the Trinity, the one Lord Jesus who is mediator of angels[11] and of all creation. He is the true image represented in the Adamic creation,[12] the head of the covenant of grace and the Lord of the new creation. H. Bavinck repeats what had already been said by Calvin on this subject: 'While the creation is a work of the whole Trinity, it cannot be denied that in Scripture it also stands in a peculiar relation to the Son . . . Christ is not only the mediator of re-creation but also of creation.'[13] As the active presence in creation, the Word and wisdom of God sets the scene for subsequent action as the Word revealed in the unfolding of divine revelation in covenantal history.[14]

Union with Christ is the concrete effect of the unique mediation of the Word and the substance of that reality. If the expression 'does not occur in the Bible, it fairly describes the central reality of revealed salvation, from its eternal design to its eschatological consummation.'[15] Union is not a single condition, constant throughout history, but rather a series of conditions anchored in God's eternal purpose. It is the most basic thing that can be said about salvation, as Jesus saves by uniting us to Himself, through the work of His Spirit, according to the plan of the Father. Even if believers are in Christ by election before the foundation of the world and before their baptism, they are only savingly so in Christ subsequent to effectual calling, justification

---

11. On Calvin's debates with Francesco Stancaro, see J. Tylanda, 'Christ the Mediator: Calvin versus Stancaro', *Calvin Theological Journal* 7 (1972), pp. 5–16. See also S. Edmondson, *Calvin's Christology* (Cambridge University Press 2004), ch. 1.

12. P. E. Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1989), III.

13. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* II (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2004), p. 423. On Calvin and Bavinck, see J. T. Billings, *Union with Christ. Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2011), pp. 70–86.

14. P. Wells, 'Calvin and Union with Christ: the Heart of Christian Doctrine' in J. R. Beeke and G. J. Williams, (eds.) *Calvin. Theologian and Reformer,.* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books 2010), ch. 4.

15. R. B. Gaffin, 'Union with Christ : Some Biblical and Theological Reflections', in A. T. B. McGowan (ed.) *Always Reforming* (Leicester: Apollos 2006), ch. 8.

and the exercise of faith.[16] Concerning the time of union, Kuyper distinguishes five stages: the decree of God, the incarnation, regeneration, the first exercise of faith, the conscious enjoyment of it and finally union in glory after death. S. Ferguson simplifies this schema to three moments: the eternal, the incarnational and the existential.[17]

Sanctification begins in us with the existential laying hold on Christ by faith. Believers are, as rebellious creatures, outside Christ until drawn into Him by faith, called *insitio in Christum* by classic reformed theology and described as a 'real, wholesale, spiritual and indissoluble union of the persons of the elect with the divine-human person of the Redeemer, so that for the former the latter is exactly the same as soul is for body.'[18] They are so intimately united to Christ that they become one body and one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17; 12:13), a reality described by a series of New Testament metaphors and by Calvin as engrafting, indwelling and participation.[19] The mutual communion in a single unity echoes trinitarian unity in which the divine persons are together a single entity. It is often described by five attributes with legal, objective and existential aspects as a union that is real, inclusive, indissoluble, spiritual and mystical.[20] The whole is often termed 'mystical' as a corporal unity that is *secret,* not natural but spiritual. Since the expressions spiritual and mystical are subject to misunderstanding, R. Gaffin has suggested that *mystical* should be taken in the sense of the New Testament *mysterion.* It indicates that 'what has been hidden with God in his eternal purposes now, finally, has been revealed in Christ, particularly in his death and

---

16.   J. Frame, *Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing 2013), pp. 913f.

17.   Kuyper, op. cit., pp. 335–7; S. B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit,* (Leicester: InterVarsity 1996), pp. 106–111.

18.   H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1978), p. 511.

19.   Wells, op. cit., pp. 73–82.

20.   Heppe, op. cit., p. 512, quoting P. Van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, 1725, VI, v, pp. 10–13. cf. L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1953), p. 450, who uses the attributes organic, vital, spiritual, reciprocal, personal and transformational.

resurrection, and is appropriated by faith (Rom. 16:25; Col. 1:26-7; 2:2).'[21] This proviso provides a necessary historico-redemptive mooring of union in the *ordo salutis* and the accomplishment of the plan of salvation.

Because of the very nature of union with Christ, sanctification could hardly be considered an evanescent reality, but must be an expression of God's faithfulness to His promises. It is as real in the application of salvation to believers as it is in the promises made to the mediator Himself concerning its accomplishment. Christ's mediation binds together in one movement redemption accomplished and applied in the *ordo salutis*.

2.2 The language of sanctification

When the New Testament usage of the words sanctification/holiness is considered, we find rather unexpected angles in the light of what 'holiness' has come to mean, particularly in contexts where progress toward perfection is taken as the norm for Christian experience. The verb *to sanctify*, the noun *sanctification* and the adjective *holy* rarely have the sense of progressive ethical renewal.[22] The dominant meaning indicates the status of consecration to God which results from being set apart for His service. *Hagiasmos*, used ten times in the New Testament,[23] is translated either by sanctification or holiness in different versions. If in some cases the context does suggest dynamic renewal and progressive sanctification, it is best understood, as D. Peterson states, 'as a state of holiness arising from God's consecrating work in Christ. The motivation and power to express that

---

21. Gaffin, op. cit., p. 272. The mystery of the kingdom and the hidden glory of the suffering and all-powerful Messiah it unfolds, G. K. Beale and B. L. Gladd, *Hidden But Now Revealed. A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Nottingham: Apollos 2014), pp. 320–39.

22. *Hagiazein, hagiasmos* and *hagios,* used 28x, 10x and 233x respectively; see D. Peterson, *Possessed by God. The New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Leicester: Apollos 1995), pp. 139–42. *Hosiotes* and *hosios*, used 3x, refer to devotion to God.

23. See Peterson's chart, ibid., p. 140: The ten references (translated sanctification and holiness five times each in the KJV) are Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Thess. 4:3, 4, 7; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet.1:2.

holiness is given to believers by the indwelling Holy Spirit.'[24] Packer comments that 'the positional holiness of consecration and acceptance underlies the personal transformation that is normally what we have in mind when we speak of sanctification.'[25] However, contrary to common parlance, the biblical use pleads that sanctification be understood as relational holiness based on God's act of consecration, followed by the consequent dedication to the Lord in practical living.

In the context of union with Christ, sanctification is primarily a question of *status*, based upon the imputation of Christ's righteousness, accompanied by the holiness resulting from union with Christ, who has defeated sin and death. The *dynamic* aspect of sanctification, referred to in terms of growing in grace, conformity to Christ's image and the struggle against sin, refers to the active faith of the person who is indwelt by the Spirit, sharing in Christ's holiness and ruled by it. Being 'perfected' (*teteleiotai*) in the love of God, abiding in Christ, means walking in the same way that He walked (1 John 2:5-6). Progressive sanctification is subsidiary to the definitive relation with Christ, which is the matrix for Christian growth.

This is a different slant from the one we are most accustomed to. Peterson goes so far as to state that 'sanctification means being appropriated by God and dedicated to him by the saving work of his Son . . . Sanctification has to do with the identity and status of those who are "in Christ".'[26] It is the making holy of a life given by the Lord, describing the definitive situation of the believer in Christ, no less granted than justification itself. As J. Webster says:

> The sanctifying Spirit is *Lord*; that is, sanctification is not in any straightforward sense a process of cooperation or coordination between God and the creature, a drawing out or building upon some inherent holiness of the creature's own. Sanctification is

24.   ibid., p. 142.

25.   cf. Packer, op. cit., p. 104.

26.   Peterson, op. cit., p. 40.

making holy. Holiness is properly an incommunicable divine attribute; if creaturely realities become holy, it is by virtue of election, that is, by a sovereign act of segregation or separation by the Spirit of the Lord.[27]

Sanctification or holiness is therefore primarily a geographical concept as R. Letham says, because God has removed the believer from one place to a new spiritual situation. In a definitive sense this removal 'has already taken place in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.'[28] The difference between justification and sanctification lies perhaps in the sense that the first does not have an eschatological reference, whereas the second includes the idea of process, although justification is also an anticipation of the final eschatological verdict to be pronounced in and by Christ.

How does this perspective fit in with the history of salvation and the reformed interpretation of it in terms of creation-fall-redemption?

3. Righteousness and Holiness in Adam and in Christ

God's nature is to be holy; His holiness is eternal; He can no more not be holy than He cannot be God.[29] Although holiness ultimately belongs only to God, in so far as creation is a divine work, it mirrors the creator. Holiness is God's gift to creation in three senses, ontological, epistemological and ethical, and man is created with a holy nature. As the image of God, he can truly know and serve Him in righteousness. Man's holiness is derived and reflective, just as his living is derived life and his immortality is not a natural possession. The primal garden was a holy sanctuary consecrated by the presence of God for communion, and man was called in that context to glorify the enthroned Creator. The

---

27. J. Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003), p. 27.

28. Letham, op. cit., p. 87.

29. Webster, *Holiness*, p. 42.

creation was a royal protectorate to be consummated in the cosmic sabbath.[30] Man's holiness was therefore conditional, derived and dependent, awaiting consummation through enacted righteousness in accordance with God's command. When Adam fell, what he lost was righteousness, holiness and truth, which are only restored in Christ (Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10).

3.1 Holiness and righteousness

Kuyper correctly drew a foundational distinction between holiness and righteousness, the first concerning the realm of being, the second involving status.[31] If God's holiness is eternal, belonging to His nature and having trinitarian expression, divine righteousness belongs not to His nature as such, but is the expression of the sum of His divine attributes and His holy kingship over creation. Holiness is inherent in the divine nature, whereas divine righteousness does not manifest itself until it is displayed in creation, through the existence of a jural relationship binding God and man. In the Adamic administration man was called to conform to the divine law and display righteousness in obedience to divine sovereignty, and in this way to demonstrate his inner constitutional holiness externally.

The fall was a rebellion against God's kingly status, a denial of His righteous sovereignty and law, and it demonstrated an inner corruption of holiness that led to the rejection of God. By overturning God's rule, Adam lost righteousness under the law and entered into condemnation and death, because the relation with God was severed. The divine curse is a result of unrighteousness and the corresponding loss of holiness. Man becomes a child of wrath; that is his *nature*, because holiness has given way to the pollution and stain of sin. He is unrighteous in terms of the divine law, that is his *status*, because of his refusal of divine kingship and disobedience. When Adam lost his holiness, he created a universal problem for humanity, and consequently

---

30. M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue. Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park: Two Age Press 2000), ch. 3.

31. Kuyper, op. cit., p. 444.

there are, after Adam, no holy human beings outside of Jesus, the second Adam.

This contrast between holiness and righteousness has multiple and far-reaching consequences. Existentially, what do sinners do? As covenant breakers, they seek to avoid God's righteousness by denying His sovereignty, hiding like Adam and Jonah did, pretending they can do enough to be acceptable to God; alternatively they deny the existence of a binding divine law, natural or revealed. God's righteousness antagonises sinners who curse God by blaming Him for their own faults. Guilt-transference is the sinful reaction to the righteous demands of the Lord. The holiness of God, on the other hand, arouses in sinners a feeling of lack and shame because of the stain of sin and hopelessness. Not guilt and condemnation, but emptiness and meaninglessness lead to the search for ersatz forms of holiness, idols, and counterfeit spiritualities. False religion always proposes fake holiness without righteousness and sinners hide from the demands of divine sovereignty in its practices.

3.2 Justification and sanctification

This contrast is also the foundation of the theological distinction between sanctification and justification. The latter is related to the demands of God's law and their fulfilment. Since the fall the way of holiness is shut tight to unrighteous sinners. Works cannot justify because they can never help us to progress an iota toward the holiness required for communion with God. Justification logically precedes sanctification as a divine act, complete in itself, in the place of the absence of human merits. It is the righteousness of God, grace apart from the law. Its status exists because of 'alien' righteousness. Holiness is not the result of anything we can do to attain it. It is freely gifted to us as God unites us to His holy One, the Lord Jesus. We rest in Christ's holiness, we receive a new nature in Christ and, as children of God, grow in grace as the dynamic of trust increases,

in deepened dependence on Him.[32] Holiness is not acquired through performance, nor can performance justify; it can only create deceptive self-righteousness and an illusion of holiness. This is why union with Christ is the essence of sanctification. It indicates that sanctification does not mean getting more holy through acts of righteousness, nor is it testable by the fact that 'every day in every way I'm getting better and better'. If we grow in grace in union with Christ, we never get beyond 'miserable sinner Christianity', Luther's *simul justus et peccator.*[33]

3.3 The covenant of grace and incarnation

All this has a bearing on Christ's work in the covenant of grace, programmed in the eternal covenant of redemption, which is the basis of all the historical covenants.[34] According to God's eternal plan, Christ fulfils the covenant of works broken in Adam and is the mediator of a new covenant of grace.[35] Two aspects of Christ's work bear on the righteousness and holiness we receive from Him as mediator; He fulfilled both these conditions to make saving union with Himself possible. Union with Christ is firstly a consequence of His holy incarnational union with humanity and secondly, in our humanity He fulfilled 'all righteousness' (Matt. 3:15).

The eternal Word took human nature into personal union with His divinity and joined Himself to humanity forever. Consequently 'the basis of our union with Christ is Christ's union with us in the incarnation.'[36] In the Lord Jesus human nature was sanctified in communion with the divine nature, in the womb of the virgin, in His growth (Luke 2:52), His baptism,

---

32.   Kuyper, op. cit, pp. 440–3 on justification and sanctification.

33.   cf. Warfield's admirable remarks on 'miserable sinner Christianity' in op. cit*.,* VII, 179ff.

34.   Horton, op. cit., p. 130.

35.   G. Vos, 'The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology', in R. B. Gaffin, Jr., (ed.), *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing 1980), pp. 234–67.

36.   Letham, op. cit., p. *2*1 and all ch. 2; cf. Peterson, op. cit., ch. 2.

His transfiguration, His suffering and finally His death and resurrection. The life-sanctification of His humanity was an ongoing dynamic drama enacted in the time between the miracles of the virgin birth and the resurrection. Human nature itself is saved and made holy in the person of Jesus. There was no divine-human life in His person since the creator-creature distinction 'is inviolate, *and also* the compatibility of God and man'.[37] The Word entered the conditions of creation in order to renew creation, and did so as His flesh was suffused with the holy qualities of divinity, renewing humanity. In John 10:36 Jesus described Himself as 'the one whom the Father has sanctified (*hegiasen*) and sent into the world'. He reconsecrated defiled humanity in His body, to become a temple for holy service to God. However, the incarnation is for atonement; Jesus consecrates Himself by laying down His life for the sheep (10:11-30), and fulfils the will of the Father (4:34). He dedicates Himself to become a sacrifice for sins. In John 17:19 he prays, 'for their sakes (the disciples) I sanctify myself so that they may also be sanctified in truth.'

In Hebrews 2:10-11 we again find the word *sanctify*: 'he who sanctifies and they who are sanctified all have one origin' – that is God the Father, who 'in bringing many sons to glory makes the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.' This text is often interpreted as referring to Christ's accomplishment of the covenant of redemption, in particular in the light of verse 13. The Father as the origin of salvation consecrates the Son to His service, and those being brought to glory are sanctified together with him. They are united in the Son, who Himself becomes perfect though suffering, to accomplish the Father's purpose of consecration for salvation. This note is again sounded in Hebrews 10:9-10. The Son comes to accomplish the will of the Father and 'by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all', repeated in 10:29 in 'sanctified by the blood of the covenant'. In these cases 'the verb *to sanctify* is primarily employed in a covenantal sense.

---

37.   ibid., p. 36.

Christ's sacrifice binds men and women to God in a new relation of heart-obedience.'[38] The perfecting (*teleo*) of Christ referred to in Hebrews 2:10, 5:9 and 7:28 is not a moral action, even if the holiness required for drawing near to God is not absent from the thought. It refers primarily to the high-priestly ministry of Christ who has fulfilled God's promises in establishing the final covenant with a 'better hope' than the old covenant, introducing believers into the eternal security of the kingdom.[39]

Sanctification in these instances is not inner holiness. It is receiving renewed dispositions from Christ, who alone is holy, and being reformatted in His holiness. This consecration is for covenant service in following Him. 'By a single offering he has perfected (*teteleioken*) for all time those who are being sanctified (*tous hagiazomenous*)' indicates that what we receive in Christ in the dynamic of sanctification is nothing other than what is already complete in His finished work (10:14).

3.4 Righteousness and holiness in Christ

Christ is our holiness as He sanctifies our human nature. He is our righteousness as He obeys God's law. Union with Christ rests on His work of righteousness on our behalf. If His holiness does not directly constitute the basis for our sanctification in union with Him, Christ's justice does, as He fulfils God's legal requirements. Adam not only did not achieve righteousness through obedience, but he also inherited death because of rebellion and disobedience. As the second Adam Christ assumes both the outcomes of the original sin. Not only does He carry out complete obedience to God's law, but He suffers the consequences of our disobedience in our place. His active and passive obedience, which are often distinguished as two forms of obedience, in fact make up the one obedience of the one mediator. The covenant of grace is constructed on both the debris of Adam's failure and the success of Christ's obedience in fulfilling the conditions of the covenant

---

38.   Peterson, op. cit., p. 35.

39.   ibid., pp. 36f.

of works. In His role as mediator Christ not only took Adam's place, but also our place to do the works we could not do and pay the price we could not pay.

The outcome of the obedience of Christ, active and passive, is that in Christ we are justified, as if we had never sinned and had rendered complete obedience to God's covenant ourselves.[40] As our surety, Christ is the author of reconciliation in making payment for sin, resulting in the remission of sin (2 Cor. 5:19). He is our righteousness and our peace, apart from any work, on the basis of His work alone (Rom. 4:5-6). What belongs to Christ is ours because of union with Him; it is received by imputation, because what is properly Christ's is legally imputed to us.[41] Imputation is a double act of God, simply because the theological distinction between active and passive obedience is made to elucidate the function of the one justice of the one Christ, which is counted as a whole to sinners.[42] Nor is it feasible to say that we are justified by incorporation into Christ not by imputation, as we cannot be united to Christ if we are unholy and have not received imputed righteousness from Christ. For this reason, as Gaffin says, 'while there is no imputation without union or antecedent to union, neither is there union without imputation.'[43]

Although reformed theology has occasionally used the word 'imputed' in the context of sanctification, Scripture does not speak this way in a conceptual sense. The holiness of Christ is imparted to us in union with Christ because we are united to Him as our covenant head and as a result of the righteousness of

---

40. *Heidelberg Catechism*, q.60.

41. H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics,* IV (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2008), pp. 212–14, calls this extrinsic imputation, as the person justified in a legal sense is ungodly in the ethical.

42. It is difficult to see how one obedience could be separated from the other in the act of imputation. See C. R. Venema, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth 2006), pp. 246–9; J. Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth 1961 [1867]), pp. 332–3.

43. Gaffin, art. cit., p. 286.