

Sanctification & Justification

by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

This article is extracted from Kuyper's classic book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1888; American edition 1900) vol. 3, chapters 3-4. The electronic edition of this article was scanned and edited by Shane Rosenthal. It is in the public domain and may be freely copied and distributed. Original pagination has been kept for purposes of reference.

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 440

Yield your members servants to righteousness unto sanctification." --Rom. vi. 19.

SANCTIFICATION must remain Sanctification. It may not arbitrarily be robbed of its significance, nor be exchanged for something else. It must always signify the making holy of what is unholy or less holy. p. 440, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

Care must be taken not to confound sanctification with justification; a common mistake, frequently made by thoughtless Scripture readers. Hence the importance of a thorough understanding of this difference. Being left unnoticed, it may lead to confused preaching, which causes one-sidedness; and active and thoughtful men invariably systematize their one-sidedness. p. 440, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

What, then, is the difference? According to our ancient theologians it is fourfold: p. 440, par. 3, [SANCJUST]

1. Justification works *for* man; sanctification *in* man. p. 440, par. 4, [SANCJUST]
2. Justification removes the *guilt*; sanctification the *stain*. p. 440, par. 5, [SANCJUST]
3. Justification imputes to us an *extraneous* righteousness: sanctification works a righteousness *inherent* as our own. p. 440, par. 6, [SANCJUST]
4. Justification is at once *completed*; sanctification increases gradually; hence remains *imperfect*. p. 440, par. 7, [SANCJUST]

In the main the answer is correct, but insufficient to meet present error. It is shallow, external, and incomplete, makes too much of righteous-*making* and holy-*making*, while it does not consider righteousness and holiness, a correct. idea of which is absolutely necessary for the clear understanding of justification and sanctification. p. 440, par. 8, [SANCJUST]

Let us examine these fundamental ideas, first, in God Himself. It becomes evident at once that the words, "Our God is righteous," Impress us otherwise than. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!" p. 440, par. 9, [SANCJUST]

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 441

The latter impresses us with the feeling that the name of Jehovah is infinitely exalted above the low level of this impure and sinful life; we discover a distance between Him and ourselves which, as it widens in more transcendent holiness, casts us back into ourselves as impure creatures, while it causes His Being to be resplendent in the light unapproachable. If the angels exalting His holiness cover their faces with their wings, how much more ought we sinful men consider it with covered face and in godly fear! "The Lord is of purer eyes than to behold evil," impresses us with the deep sense of God's unspeakable sensitiveness, which is so keen that even the faintest suggestion of sin or impurity arouses in Him such antipathy that He can not bear the sight of it. p. 441, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

But *guilt* is out of the question. In the presence of the divine holiness we do not feel guilty, but are overwhelmed by the consciousness of our utter uncleanness and wickedness. Even among men we do not always feel quite satisfied with ourselves. Our brother's warmer zeal and love often make us feel ashamed. Yet the feeling does not amount to loathing of self. But in the presence of the holiness of God we feel at once with Isaiah our spiritual impurity, and are inclined to cry for a live coal from the altar to sanctify our lips; and the word "loathing of self" is not too strong to express our feeling as we prostrate ourselves before the holiness of the Lord Jehovah. p. 441, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

This establishes the antithesis at once. The divine holiness in its most exalted aspect affects us, not with fear of punishment, or with anguish, because we owe a debt that we can not pay; but with *dissatisfaction* with ourselves, with abhorrence of our uncleanness, and contempt for our righteousnesses which are as filthy rags. It makes us feel, not our *guilt*, but our *sin*; not our *condemnation*, but our hopeless *wickedness*; it does not crush us under the penalty of the law, but it causes us to be consumed by our impurity; it does not overwhelm us by righteousness, but it uncovers our unholiness and inward corruption. p. 441, par. 3, [SANCJUST]

~~But the divine righteousness affects us altogether differently. It does not impress~~
me with the transcendence of His exalted Covenant name as the divine holiness; but in God's hand it oppresses me, pursues me, leaves me no rest, seizes me, and breaks me to pieces under its weight. His holiness makes the soul thirst after holiness, and with sorrow we see His majesty depart. But His p. 441, par. 4, [SANCJUST]

righteousness antagonizes the soul, which does not *desire* it. but struggles to *escape* from it. p. 442, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

Sometimes it seems different, but only seemingly so. Godly men in the Old and New Covenants frequently invoke the divine righteousness. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" This divine upholding of the right is the strength, the prospect, and the consolation of His oppressed people. This is why in the closing article of their Confession our fathers cry for the day of judgment, when as the righteous judge He shall destroy all His enemies and ours. Yet the difference is only seeming. In this case the divine right is directed against others, not ourselves; but the effect is the same. It is His people's prayer and hope that the divine right pursue those enemies, and deal with them according to their deserts. p. 442, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

Hence God's righteousness impresses us, first, with the fact of His authority over us; that not *we*, but He must determine what is right, and how we ought to be; that all our opposition is vain, for His power will enforce the right; hence that we must suffer the effects of that righteousness. p. 442, par. 3, [SANCJUST]

But it is not merely the *power* of the right that impresses us, neither the consciousness that we are taken and judged, but much more, that we are taken and judged *righteously*. And not this arbitrarily; on the contrary, we feel inwardly that the divine might is right, and therefore may and must overpower us. p. 442, par. 4, [SANCJUST]

Hence the divine righteousness includes the creature's acknowledgment: "The prerogative to determine the right is not mine, but His." And not only this, but our souls are deeply conscious that God's decisions are not only right and good, but *absolutely* righteous and *superlatively* good. p. 442, par. 5, [SANCJUST]

The divine righteousness brings us face to face with a direct working of the divine *sovereignty*. All earthly sovereignty is but a feeble reflection of the divine; but sufficiently clear to show us its fundamental features. A sovereign is deemed sufficiently wise to see how things ought to be; and *qualified* to determine that so they shall be; and *powerful* to resist him who dares be otherwise. This applies also to the King of kings; or rather, it applies, not to Him *also*, but to Him *alone*. He alone is the *Wisdom* with absolute certainty to choose, and according to this choice to see how everything must be to be its best. He alone is the holy *Qualified One*, according to this to determine how everything must be. And He p. 442, par. 6, [SANCJUST]

is the alone-*Mighty* to condemn and destroy what dares be otherwise. p. 443, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

And this reveals the deepest features of the contrast. The holiness of God relates to His *Being*; the righteousness of God to His *Sovereignty*. Or, His righteousness touches His *relation* and *position* to the creature; His holiness points to His own inward *Being*. p. 443, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

Sanctification and Justification Continued (Chapter 4, volume 3).

He that is holy, let him be holy still." -Rev. xxii. 11.

THE divine Righteousness, having reference to the divine Sovereignty, in one sense does not manifest itself until God enters into relationship with the creatures. He was glorious in holiness from all eternity, for man's creation did not modify His Being; but His righteousness could not be displayed before creation, because right presupposes two beings sustaining the jural relation. p. 444, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

An exile on an uninhabited island can not be righteous nor do righteously; he can not even conceive of the jural relation so long as there is no man present whose rights he must respect, or who can deny his rights. The arrival of other men will necessarily create the jural relation between him and them. But so long as he remains alone, he may be holy or unholy, but he can not be said to be righteous or unrighteous. In like manner it may be said of God that before creation He was holy, but could not display His righteousness simply because there were no creatures sustaining toward Him the jural relation. But immediately after the creation the display of righteousness became possible. p. 444, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

Still the illustration can be applied to God only to a certain extent. Essentially God is not alone, but Triune in persons; hence there is between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit a mutual relation. This relation, being the highest, tenderest, and most intimate, contains from eternity the completest expression of righteousness. And even with reference to the creature, the divine righteousness did not originate until after the creation, but finds perfect expression in the eternal counsel. That counsel not only determines every possible jural relation between the creatures and the Creator, and the creatures themselves, but indicates also the means whereby this relation must be restored when broken or disturbed. p. 444, par. 3, [SANCJUST]

Hence His righteousness is as eternal as His Being; yet, in order to express clearly the difference between holiness and righteousness, we may say that as His holiness was glorious from eternity, so is His righteousness displayed and exercised only *in time, i.e.*, since the creature began to exist. It did not originate then, but became perceptible then. Whatever may be said on the subject, the fundamental difference remains that God is holy even though considered alone by Himself; while His *righteousness* begins to radiate when He is considered in relation to His creatures. God is holy essentially; before the least impurity existed, there was in Him vital pressure to repel all foreign mingling with His Being. But only as *Sovereign* could He determine the right, maintain the violated right, and execute righteousness upon the violator. p. 445, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

In its fundamental features this applies to us as men. Even in us righteousness is entirely different from holiness; the former has exclusive reference to our relation to and position before God, man, and angel; while holiness refers, not to any relation, but to the *quality* of our inner being. We speak of righteousness only when it concerns our relation to God or man. Noah is said to have been a righteous man "in his generation," which indicates not his essential quality, but his *relation* to others. p. 445, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

Righteousness implies right, which is unthinkable but as existing between two persons in connection with the qualification of either one or of a third to determine that right. Hence man's righteousness with reference to God has a twofold aspect: *First*, it implies the acknowledgment of God's sovereign qualifications to determine man's relation to God and man. p. 445, par. 3, [SANCJUST]

Second, it implies reverence for the divine laws and ordinances enacted with regard to man's service of God. p. 445, par. 4, [SANCJUST]

A man may keep strictly some of these ordinances, not from the motive of reverence, but because he is compelled to approve them. In some respects he gives God His due; but His position is wrong. He fails to honor God as his sovereign Ruler, to acknowledge God as God, and to bow before His majesty. p. 445, par. 5, [SANCJUST]

Or he may reverence the divine authority in the abstract, but in practise constantly rob God of His right. p. 445, par. 6, [SANCJUST]

Therefore *original* righteousness, which has reference to man's status before God as a creature, and *derived* righteousness, which refers to the act of honoring the

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 446

things. Both are righteousness--i.e., the act of occupying the position divinely ordained. But the first refers to our personal standing in the position determined by God; the second to the act of conforming our thoughts, words, and deeds to His divine requirements. p. 446, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

It is unnecessary to speak particularly of righteousness with reference to men. Whatever we do in relation to them is righteous or unrighteous according to its conformity or non-conformity to the divine ordinance, and every transgression against the neighbor becomes sin only because it is in non-conformity to the righteousness of God. p. 446, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

Briefly, man's righteousness consists of two parts: p. 446, par. 3, [SANCJUST]

First, that his status be what God has determined. p. 446, par. 4, [SANCJUST]

Second, that his *thoughts, words, and deeds* be conformed to the divine ordinances. Hence our righteousness *need not be the product of our own soul's labor*. The original righteousness of Adam and Eve lacked nothing, although they had not done anything to it personally. They simply stood in the right position before God--a position not self-assumed, but divinely determined. And so may the right, after it is disturbed, be restored independently of the violator, by a third person. The question is not *how* the right relation was restored, but whether it agrees again with God's sovereign will. p. 446, par. 5, [SANCJUST]

He that delivers a debtor from imprisonment by paying his debts restores him to his right relation to his former creditors, even though the prisoner himself did not pay a farthing of the debt. Because righteousness has reference to mutual relations, the right is satisfied as soon as the disturbed relation is restored and the lost position recovered. How it was accomplished is immaterial. p. 446, par. 6, [SANCJUST]

This gives us a deeper insight into the profound significance of the cross, and why it is that our righteousness can not be increased nor decreased, although it does not affect our essential character. p. 446, par. 7, [SANCJUST]

Entirely different is the soul's holiness, which touches directly the quality of person and character; as our ancient theologians correctly expressed it: "Justification acts *for* man; sanctification *inheres in* man." p. 446, par. 8, [SANCJUST]

The ungodly is justified, i.e., the very moment that he believes; before sanctification has begun to operate in him, he knows that he stands before God perfectly right. He is not merely beginning to be right; partly right, to be a little more right to-morrow, and perfectly p. 446, par. 9, [SANCJUST]

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 447

right when he enters heaven; but perfectly right now, henceforth, and forevermore. He is righted not only for the present and for all eternity, but also for the past. He is assured of standing before God in flawless right, as though he had never been wrong, nor ever could be wrong again. p. 447, par. 1, [SANCJUST]

Hence the consciousness of being justified is instantaneous and at once complete, and can not be increased nor decreased. And this is possible because this righteousness has nothing to do with his being, but has exclusive reference to the relation in which he sees himself placed. This relation was miserable and wholly unrighteous; but another, outside of himself, has restored that relation and made it what it ought to be. Hence he stands right, without any reference whatever to his personal being. This is the deep significance of the confession that he who is justified is always *an ungodly person*. p. 447, par. 2, [SANCJUST]

But this is not the case in regard to man's holiness; that touches his person and can act be effected outside of his inward being. p. 447, par. 3, [SANCJUST]