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SANCTIFICATION BY JUSTIFICATION: THE FORGOTTEN INSIGHT OF BAVINCK AND BERKOUWER ON PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION

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What is the key to healthy sanctification? And how is sanctification linked with justification? Such questions have been matters of perennial discussion, going back to the Apostle Paul himself, who understood that his explication of justification by faith in the early chapters of Romans would be misunderstood as a license to sin (Rom. 5:20–6.1; 6:14–15). Recent developments—one thinks especially of the ‘new perspective on Paul’ as well as ecumenical dialogue between Protestants and Catholics—have again brought justification and its connection to sanctification to the fore. This essay does not intend to ‘solve’ this question but rather point out a neglected insight of two thinkers in the Dutch Reformed tradition regarding the relationship between gracious initiation into salvation and subsequent moral development. We will argue that Herman Bavinck and G. C. Berkouwer, each in his own way, explained spiritual progress—what we are calling ‘sanctification’¹—as taking place not by moving beyond justification but by feeding on it.² That is, sanctification does not occur

¹ I place the word in quotation marks here not because it is being used here in an innovative way but in deference to the fact that the NT does not normally use the *hagia*- (‘holy’) root to speak of progressive but of definitive sanctification (e.g. 1 Cor. 1.2, 30; 6.11; 2 Thess. 2.13; 1 Pet. 1.2). One who has been sanctified has been—once and for all—*cleansed*. The term in the NT is often just as definitive as justification, the difference being one of metaphorical denotation: while justification employs a lawcourt metaphor, sanctification draws on a cultic metaphor. On the definitive nature of sanctification in the NT see D. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (NSBT; Downers Grove: IVP, 2001). References to ‘sanctification’ in what follows, however, refer to *progressive* sanctification, which remains valid as a theological concept (see D. A. Carson, ‘The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields’, in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. by M. Husbands and D. J. Treier (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), pp. 47–9).

² As with ‘sanctification’, ‘justification’ is being used in this paper theologically and confessionally (in line especially with the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Westminster Confession) and not, in the first instance, etymologically or philologically. I use the term to speak of the moment in history at which a sinner is counted legally righteous by God through faith

by graduating on from God's justifying grace in the gospel but by reflecting on, enjoying, and appropriating it more and more deeply throughout one's life. Counterintuitive though it be, one is sanctified not by moving past justification but by ever-deepening re-orientation toward it.

This essay proceeds in three basic movements. We first explore the way Bavinck expresses his understanding of sanctification's relation to justification. Second, we do the same for Berkouwer. Third, we synthesize the basic point held in common between these two thinkers. This synthesis will include incorporating Jonathan Edwards into the discussion in light of a neglect in Berkouwer's understanding of sanctification, as well as briefly placing the Bavinck/Berkouwer insight into the larger soteriological context of union with Christ.

HERMAN BAVINCK

The recent completion of the publication of Herman Bavinck's (1854–1921) magisterial four-volume dogmatics has made this thinker far more accessible to the English-speaking world than the smattering of previously translated works had allowed.³ In what follows we rely most heavily on the fourth volume, made available in 2008, in which Bavinck discusses soteriology, the church and sacraments, and last things. The scope of Bavinck's theological vision has been summed up in the caption, 'grace restores

in Jesus Christ's atoning work. Thus this paper focuses on the dimension of justification that lies behind the believer, though this is not to deny, from a more trenchantly exegetical perspective at the ground level of the NT, an eschatological and future dimension to justification (namely, the open revealing of an already fully accomplished justification). Indeed, built into the NT conception of justification is the truth that the final acquittal has broken into the present for those who trust Christ (on which see esp. P. Stuhlmacher, *Biblische Theologie und Evangelium: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (WUNT, 146; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), p. 25; R. B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 83–100).

³ H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (ed. J. Bolt; trans. J. Vriend; 4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008). The most significant English-language volumes prior to his *Reformed Dogmatics* being translated were his *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979; repr.), which was a publication of the Stone Lectures Bavinck delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1908; *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine* (trans. H. Zylstra; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), an abridgment of the *Reformed Dogmatics*; *The Doctrine of God* (ed. and trans. W. Hendriksen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), a portion of his *Reformed Dogmatics*; and the epistemologically oriented *The Certainty of Faith* (St. Catharines: Paideia, 1980).

nature'.⁴ He saw God's redemptive programme, climaxing in Christ, as a return to the wholeness and peace of Eden, and better than Eden. A particularly satisfying dimension of the *Reformed Dogmatics* for biblical scholars is Bavinck's facility not only with the biblical languages but also with the Jewish intertestamental literature.

We hasten on to sanctification in Bavinck. Already in his discussion of justification one finds hints of where Bavinck will ultimately go in explaining justification's relation to sanctification. 'The gospel is the food of faith and must be known to be nourishment', he writes.⁵ Drawing upon Luther's Romans commentary, Bavinck later explains that believers are to trust solely in God's righteousness imputed to them on account of Christ's work. He then says: 'At the start of their lives as believers *as well as in the course of their lives*, they continue to take God at his word. They continue to believe that they are sinners and that their righteousness is grounded solely in the righteousness of God.'⁶ Though not as explicit as later statements in his treatment of sanctification, it is not surprising in hindsight to see Bavinck speaking of justification as relevant to believers their whole lives long before moving on to discuss sanctification.

In explaining sanctification, Bavinck early on expresses his concern that some orthodox branches of the Church—Pietism, Methodism, Wesleyanism—have promulgated the widespread but erroneous notion that sanctification is a subsequent, humanly-resourced postscript to justification.

All the sects that arose in Protestant churches more or less proceeded from the idea that the confession of justification by faith was, if not incorrect, at least defective and incomplete and had to be augmented with sanctification. Pietism prescribed a specific method of conversion and then gathered the de-

⁴ See *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pp. 92–5, 598, 715–24. It is noteworthy that Bavinck treats justification and sanctification not in vol. 3, 'Sin and Salvation in Christ', but in vol. 4, 'Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation'. He saw the traditional elements of the *ordo salutis* as being part of a much broader redemptive project involving not just the individual sinner but the entire cosmos. See J. Veenhof, *Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck* (trans. A. M. Wolters; Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, 2006). Bavinck stood on Calvin's shoulders in this regard, though the grace-restoring-nature paradigm was more fundamental and pervasive to Bavinck's theology as a whole; see P. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 383–4. For a contemporary exposition of this key dimension to Bavinck's thought, see A. M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁵ *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 193–4; emphasis added.

vout in small sealed-off circles . . . marked by a rigorous but also in many ways narrowly defined moral life. Methodism not only advanced a specific method of conversion but also gradually arrived at a special doctrine of sanctification. John Wesley not only distinguished justification from sanctification but separated the two. . . .⁷

From here Bavinck goes on to refute the theological and exegetical viability of Wesley's understanding of perfectionism before returning more broadly to sanctification positively conceived. It is here that we come to the heart of Bavinck's insight on sanctification.

He begins by asserting that Christ wins for us holiness no less than righteousness. 'To understand the benefit of sanctification correctly,' he says, 'we must proceed from the idea that Christ is our holiness in the same sense in which he is our righteousness. He is a complete and all-sufficient Savior. He does not rest until, after pronouncing his acquittal in our conscience, he has also imparted full holiness and glory to us.'⁸ Note how Bavinck then explains the way Christ's work provides not only our righteousness but also our sanctification.

By his righteousness, accordingly, he does not just restore us to the state of the just who will go scot-free in the judgment of God, in order then to leave us to ourselves to reform ourselves after God's image and to merit eternal life. But Christ has accomplished everything. He bore for us the guilt and punishment of sin, placed himself under the law to secure eternal life for us, and then arose from the grave to communicate himself to us in all his fullness for both our righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1.30). The holiness that must completely become ours therefore fully awaits us in Christ.⁹

Bavinck then argues that a failure to include sanctification completely under the work of Christ (and not only justification) leaves one under the law.

Many people still acknowledge that we must be justified by the righteousness that Christ has acquired but believe or at least act in practice as if we must be sanctified by a holiness we bring about ourselves. If that were the case, we would not—contrary to the apostolic witness (Rom. 6.14; Gal. 4.31; 5.1, 13)—live under grace and stand in freedom but continue always to be under

⁷ Ibid., p. 245. On the errors of Pietism and Wesleyanism see also *ibid.*, p. 259; *idem*, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pp. 535–40.

⁸ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 248. He reiterates this a few pages later: 'Christ is [believers'] righteousness (δικαιοσύνη [dikaiousunē]) but in the same sense also their sanctification (ἁγιασμός [hagiasmos]; 1 Cor. 1.30)' (*ibid.*, p. 250).

⁹ Ibid. See also *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, p. 528.

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the law. Evangelical sanctification, however, is just as distinct from legalistic sanctification as the righteousness that is of faith differs from that which is obtained by works.¹⁰

In light of these statements one wonders if Bavinck has retained at all the notion of progressive sanctification. Indeed he has. Sanctification, he says, 'is continued throughout the whole of life and, by the renewing activity of the Holy Spirit, gradually makes the righteousness of Christ our personal ethical possession'.¹¹ Holiness must be worked out; it is 'an organic process'.¹² At the same time, however, justification and sanctification 'grant the same benefits, rather, the entire Christ; they only differ in the manner in which they grant him'.¹³

Bavinck goes on to explain that this is sanctification by faith. By this he means that the same trust in Christ by which one is forgiven and adopted is that by which spiritual growth occurs. He defines sanctifying faith as 'a practical knowledge of the grace that God has revealed in Christ, a heartfelt trust that he has forgiven all our sins and accepted us as his children'.¹⁴ It is striking that this description of faith comes in his discussion of sanctification, not justification. 'For that reason this faith is not only needed at the beginning in justification, but it must also accompany the Christian throughout one's entire life, and also play a permanent and irreplaceable role in sanctification. In sanctification, too, it is exclusively faith that saves us'.¹⁵ *Sola fide* applies to sanctification no less than justification.

We therefore err if we understand the gospel, the good news of God's redeeming work in Christ freely offered to sinners and grasped only through faith, as exclusively associated with an initial justification upon conversion. The gospel is rather for all of life. Trusting faith in Christ is 'the one great work Christians have to do in sanctification according to the principles of the gospel (John 6:29); it is the means of sanctification par excellence. . . . Faith breaks all self-reliance and fastens on to God's promise'.¹⁶

¹⁰ *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 248.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; cf. *ibid.*, p. 243; see also *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pp. 523, 528.

¹⁶ *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 257.

G. C. BERKOUWER

Like Bavinck, Berkouwer (1903–1996) was a man of immense learning and that rare combination of historical and theological awareness on the one hand with well-honed exegetical instincts and biblical rootedness on the other.¹⁷ One of Berkouwer's enduring legacies was his ability to incisively engage those with whom he disagreed, especially Karl Barth and various Roman Catholic theologians, while remaining a leading ecumenical figure of his day. In what follows we focus on his volumes on sanctification and justification in his 'Studies in Dogmatics' series.

Berkouwer is even more radical in describing sanctification in terms of grace and the gospel than is Bavinck. We will see that this may have led him to neglect an important dimension to general soteriology—a neglect not shared by Bavinck—but first let us get clearly before us Berkouwer's view of progressive sanctification.

A fundamental concern of his, evident in the title *Faith and Sanctification*, is that sanctification be thought of in terms of faith. He writes that 'we can speak truly of sanctification *only* when we have understood the exceptionally great significance of the bond between Sola-fide and sanctification'.¹⁸ As with Bavinck, one must not view justification as circumscribed by faith in a more fundamental way than sanctification. 'We may never speak of sanctification as if we are entering—having gone through the gate of justification—upon a new, independent field of operation'.¹⁹

At critical junctures thereafter throughout *Faith and Sanctification*, Berkouwer returns to this notion that sanctification takes place by the nourishment generated in self-consciously enjoying one's free justification. For instance:

Holiness is never a 'second blessing' placed next to the blessing of justification. . . . Our completion is only realized in Christ (Col. 2.10) 'for by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified' (Heb. 10.14). The exhortation which comes to the Church is that it must live in faith out of this

¹⁷ Note the opening pages to his volume on justification, in which Berkouwer says that 'theology is occupied in continuous attentive and obedient listening to the Word of God. . . . The word of theology has too often witnessed to itself rather than to the living Word of God. It has too often been articulate without first being attentive. When this has been so, theology has invited reproach—and deserved it' (*Faith and Justification* (trans. L. B. Smedes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 9–10).

¹⁸ G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* (trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 42; emphasis original.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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fullness; not that it must work for a second blessing, but that *it must feed on the first blessing, the forgiveness of sins*. The warfare of the Church, according to Scriptural testimony, springs from the demand really to live from this first testimony.²⁰

Here Berkouwer hijacks the language of Wesleyanism to speak of justification (here described as ‘the forgiveness of sins’) as the ‘first blessing,’ yet also the enduringly relevant blessing. The lawcourt acquittal proleptically brought into the present for those who trust Christ is the ‘fullness’ out of which believers are to continually live.²¹

Berkouwer goes on to reiterate that ‘the Reformed Confessions never teach that believers, having gone through the gate of justification, now enter upon a new territory where they must, without outside help, take their sanctification in hand. It is not true that sanctification simply succeeds justification.’²² That is, ‘there is never a stretch along the way of salvation where justification drops out of sight. Genuine sanctification—let it be repeated—stands or falls with this continued orientation toward justification and the remission of sins.’²³ Healthy Christian living, then, is not a matter of being freely justified and then moving on as a now-justified person to the ‘next step’ of sanctification. ‘The believer’s constant ‘commerce’ with the forgiveness of sins and his continued dependence on it must—both in pastoral counseling and in dogmatic analysis—be laid bare, emphasized, and kept in sight.’²⁴

Berkouwer’s great concern is the mistake of viewing justification more absolutely monergistically than sanctification. He wants to ascribe just as much priority to God’s grace and the necessity of faith in *sanctification* as in justification, for ‘the life of faith . . . feeds on God’s grace alone.’²⁵ Again,

The heart of sanctification is the life which feeds on . . . justification. There is no contrast between justification as act of God and sanctification as 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

²⁰ Ibid., p. 64; emphasis added; cf. p. 14.

²¹ See similarly B. B. Warfield’s comments on justification, sanctification, and the notion of a ‘second blessing’ in his *Perfectionism* (ed. S. G. Craig; Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1967), pp. 357–8.

²² *Faith and Sanctification*, p. 77.

²³ Ibid., pp. 77–8.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

everything revolves. Faith, though not itself creative, preserves us from autonomous self-sanctification.²⁶

Consequently, as soon as sanctification begins to lift its eyes beyond justification—or, when spiritual progress begins to be partly viewed as self-resourced in some way in which justification is not—the error of self-sanctification or moralism is encroaching. Berkouwer remarks that ‘any view of regeneration, faith, and sanctification, must be weighed and tested by the criterion of whether it does justice to the forgiveness of sins as the only ground and source of sanctification.’²⁷ In *Faith and Justification*, written two years later, he underscored his conviction that ‘sanctification is continually rooted in justification.’ Stated negatively, justification ‘may never become a station along the way, a harbor which, once passed through, may be forgotten. On the contrary, only in intimate connection with justification does talk of sanctification make any real sense.’²⁸

Up till this point Berkouwer sounds roughly like Bavinck, though the former perhaps puts the point a bit more starkly. Sanctification is ‘commerce with,’ or ‘feeding on,’ justification. The quest for sanctification will rise no higher than faith-fueled reflection on and appropriation of justification. Yet Berkouwer is far more reluctant to speak of sanctification as a ‘process,’ even wondering if such a notion has proven destructive by ineluctably infecting the orthodox concept of sanctification with misplaced and even prideful self-effort.²⁹ ‘Sanctification is not a ‘process,’” he writes, ‘certainly not a moral process, but it is being holy in Christ and having part, through faith, in his righteousness.’³⁰ Berkouwer wants to use the term ‘process’ only with the utmost caution, due to the natural human propensity to forget that ‘progress in sanctification can never consist in building up ourselves on our morality.’³¹ While he claims to ‘agree wholeheartedly that progressive sanctification is compatible with a faith-connected sanctification,’ it is clear that Berkouwer believes the former has been emphasized to the neglect of the latter.³² Thus the dominant note struck in his own theology is that sanctification is not ‘a process of ‘improvement.’”³³ Berkouwer wants to describe sanctification instead

²⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 96.

²⁸ *Faith and Justification*, p. 100; cf. p. 201.

²⁹ Note that Berkouwer devotes a whole chapter to ‘Sanctification and Humility’ (*Faith and Sanctification*, pp. 117–34).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

³¹ Ibid., p. 112.

³² Ibid., p. 107.

³³ Ibid., p. 129.

as simply increased marveling over the grace that invaded one's life upon conversion, 'as Christ becomes more wonderful to us'.³⁴ He likewise believes that certain passages are often mistakenly taken to refer to progressive sanctification. An example is the 'I press on . . .' of Philippians 3:12—"Paul's "pressing on" in Philippians 3," he says, "is certainly not aimed at moral improvement; his aim is to gain Christ (3.8)".³⁵

While Berkouwer takes the doctrine of sanctification in a direction here with which Bavinck may have been uncomfortable, both essentially agree that Christians are sanctified by the gospel; they are, in a sense, sanctified by their justification. The last paragraph of *Faith and Sanctification* makes this the very note on which the book ends: 'In the bond between faith and sanctification we perceive, no less than in the bond between faith and justification, the pulsebeat of the Gospel. If faith will but lift its blossoms to catch the sunlight of God's grace, the fruit will be a life imbued with holiness'.³⁶

SYNTHESIS

Much more would need to be said to gain a comprehensive understanding of sanctification in the theologies of Bavinck and Berkouwer. We have said little, for instance, of the role of the Holy Spirit, an important dimension to both theologians' holistic understanding of sanctification.³⁷ And below we will speak to the relationship between the Bavinck/Berkouwer insight and union with Christ. This essay focuses on one specific element, a critical and seemingly forgotten one, in understanding how sanctification works as far as *the consciousness of the believer* is concerned. Though Berkouwer makes the point somewhat more radically than Bavinck, these two Dutch Reformed thinkers are united in their understanding of justification as the self-conscious means of sanctification. The point is not merely that justification must be viewed (logically) as preceding sanctification rather than the other way round. Nor is the point that justification provides the ground for sanctification. Nor are they simply agreeing that

³⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 130. One reason for Berkouwer's downplaying of the process of moral development is his desire to retain awareness of the depravity of the human heart even after conversion. 'Our confession leaves room only for "a small beginning", even for the saintliest soul, throughout the process of sanctification' (ibid., p. 113).

³⁶ Ibid., p. 193.

³⁷ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 251–53; Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, pp. 42, 79–83, 86–7.

sanctification must not be thought of as moralistic self-effort. On all this orthodox Protestant theology of various stripes is agreed.

Bavinck and Berkouwer are making a more penetrating point. They understand that it is quite possible to decry self-resourced progress in holiness while retaining an unhealthy disconnect between justification and sanctification that sees justification as something beyond which one 'graduates' in Christian living. They argue that justification is to be seen as 'settled' in that the verdict is irreversibly delivered, yet justification is not to be seen as 'settled' in the sense that one must now therefore *move on* to sanctification. Justification is settled materially but retains critical ongoing epistemic import in Christian living. They would dissent from Charles Hodge's view that justification is simply 'the first step' in sanctification.³⁸ Rather, sanctification takes place to the degree that, and no further than, one remembers and enjoys one's justification. We are justified by self-renouncing faith; we are sanctified by that same faith.

LONELY VOICES?

Even the cursory overview provided in this essay makes it clear that Bavinck and Berkouwer are not identical in their thinking on sanctification. For instance, Bavinck tends to emphasize that Christ is our sanctification just as he is also our righteousness, and that the same faith that grants us righteousness also grants sanctification; Berkouwer, from a slightly different angle, suggests that sanctification itself is simply the increasing enjoyment of one's justification. The differences between them ought not to be flattened out. Both were, after all, speaking (as they should have) to their own times—Bavinck to the late nineteenth century and Berkouwer to the mid-twentieth. Moreover, while both frequently contrast their teaching with Roman Catholicism on one side and (less stridently) Luther on the other, Bavinck chooses Wesley, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl for his primary interlocutors on sanctification while Berkouwer chooses Kohlbrügge, Barth, and Kuyper.³⁹

Differences notwithstanding, Bavinck and Berkouwer, each in his own way, provide a single insight into the Christian life that is as relevant to daily living as it is neglected in Reformed dogmatics. One is hard pressed, for instance, to find this notion of 'sanctification by justification'

³⁸ C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), vol. 3, p. 226.

³⁹ Kohlbrügge is the one name here that will be unfamiliar to some. Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrügge (1803–1875) was a conservative Dutch pastor remembered for his emphasis on God's absolute sovereignty in salvation. Kohlbrügge critically influenced Barth as well as Berkouwer.

in the works of Reformed stalwarts Charles Hodge,⁴⁰ Louis Berkhof,⁴¹ and Anthony Hoekema.⁴² Not even the five hundred-year-old father of the Reformed faith himself cast sanctification as the deliberate feeding on justification. Like Bavinck, Calvin is keen to emphasize that both justification and sanctification are found only in Christ, yet Bavinck describes sanctification as self-consciously depending on justification in a way that is not as clearly articulated in Calvin.⁴³ To be sure, rare is the Protestant theologian who fails to deny that sanctification consists in self-effort or moral reformation. Spiritual progress, it is widely agreed, takes place only by God's grace. And the notion of 'sanctification by faith' is common parlance to many.⁴⁴ Bavinck and Berkouwer, however, are unique in satisfactorily explaining *how* this happens. Sanctification by faith, they assert, is not the notion that one is sanctified in the sweat of moral effort that is done while trusting that the Holy Spirit will take this work and conform one to Christ's image (is this how 'sanctification by faith' is generally perceived in the church today?). Rather, their answer to what it means to be 'sanctified by faith' is that the faith that justifies is the same faith that

⁴⁰ *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, pp. 213–33.

⁴¹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958). Berkhof comes nearer than Hodge to affirming what we have seen in Bavinck and Berkouwer. The closest approximation is when Berkhof says that 'it is necessary to stress the fact over and over again that sanctification is the fruit of justification, that the former is simply impossible without the latter, and that both are the fruits of the grace of God in the redemption of sinners' (ibid., p. 535). Yet despite calling sanctification the 'fruit' of justification, Berkhof does not linger here but goes on immediately to speak of humanity's need to depend on the Holy Spirit for sanctification. While this is certainly true, Berkhof does not spell out the same insight we have seen in Bavinck and Berkouwer that the content or focus of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying activity in the mind of the believer is the work of Christ, the gospel of free justification.

⁴² See Hoekema's contribution in M. E. Dieter, et al, *Five Views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 65–6; also Hoekema's *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 192–233.

⁴³ J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; ed. J. T. McNeill; trans. F. L. Battles; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), III.iii.5–20. On Calvin's understanding of the relation between justification and sanctification, the duplex gratia coordinated in union with Christ, see C. P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The 'Twofold Grace of God' and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Reformed Historical Theology, 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); J. T. Billings, 'John Calvin's Soteriology: On the Multifaceted "Sum" of the Gospel', *IJST* 11 (2009), 428–47, esp. pp. 445–6.

⁴⁴ Most recently see J. M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008), pp. 916–7.

sanctifies; or more precisely, the kind of faith that sanctifies is the faith that views resolutely one's free justification. As paradoxical as it seems, it is fixing on the forgiveness of moral failures—not moving beyond it—that cultivates holiness.

This is not to say Bavinck and Berkouwer stand alone absolutely in their insight into the organic connection between justification and sanctification and the way the latter is self-consciously fueled by the former. One finds a similar notion, for instance, in (not surprisingly) Luther, who calls sanctification 'the doctrine of the godliness which is caused by the justification of the heart'.⁴⁵ Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938), Swiss professor of Tübingen, wrote that Paul sees 'in justification the effective motivation for one's conduct of life, so that it produces obedience'.⁴⁶ In some ways Karl Barth, too, with his radical emphasis on definitive sanctification (believers, he provocatively says, are *simul peccator et sanctus*⁴⁷) and the indissoluble link between justification and sanctification, expounds the latter similarly.⁴⁸ John Calvin, Francis Turretin, Jonathan Edwards, J. Gresham Machen, and Hendrikus Berkhof at various places hint at the Bavinck/Berkouwer thesis.⁴⁹ Among the Reformed confessions the most pertinent

⁴⁵ *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (compiled by E. M. Plass; St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 720; cf. p. 723. See also e.g. M. Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, pp. 285–6; idem, *The Freedom of a Christian* (trans. M. D. Tranvik; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), p. 55.

⁴⁶ *The Theology of the Apostles* (trans. A. J. Köstenberger; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 248; see the whole discussion on pp. 248–50; cf. pp. 236–7; also idem, *The Church in the New Testament Period* (trans. P. P. Levertoff; London: SPCK, 1961), pp. 25–6.

⁴⁷ *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, p. 575.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 499–511. See G. Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 298–304; idem, 'A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Barth', in *Conversing with Barth* (ed. J. C. McDowell and M. Higton; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 68–89. Barth may have neglected, however, the *progressive* dimension to sanctification.

⁴⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.v.15; III.iii.19; III.vi.2; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2: *Eleventh through Seventeenth Topics* (ed. J. T. Dennison, Jr.; trans. G. M. Giger; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), pp. 692–93 (thanks to Uche Anizor for this reference); Edwards, 'The Spirit of True Saints Is a Spirit of Divine Love', in *The Glory and Honor of God: Volume 2 of the Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (ed. M. D. McMullen; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), pp. 288–9; Machen, *What Is Faith?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), p. 153; H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (rev. ed.; trans. S. Woudstra; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 456–57, 475 (thanks to David Reimer for point-

statement comes from the assertion in the Canons of Dort that ‘just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so he preserves, continues, and completes his work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises’ (5.14). Perhaps the most significant precursor to what Bavinck and Berkouwer suggest is the 1692 work by the little-known Puritan Walter Marshall entitled *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*.⁵⁰

All of these, however, speak of conscious reflection on justification as integral to sanctification either passingly or ambiguously. Bavinck and Berkouwer, on the other hand, express the point with such clarity, frequency, and in a way so foreign to Protestant thinking about sanctification at the popular level that their articulation of this dimension of sanctification is worthy of singling out.

BERKOUWER'S NEGLECT

We cannot end here, however, for there is an important difference between this pair of Dutch thinkers that has not yet been raised. While both speak of sanctification as fueled by believers' self-conscious reflection on the freeness of their justification, Bavinck retains the historic Reformed doctrine of the new moral inclination imparted in regeneration, allowing his understanding of sanctification to be appropriately informed by it, while Berkouwer does not. Indeed, Berkouwer interacts directly with Bavinck on this as a point of disagreement and is loath to concede the reality of any kind of newly imported foreign power, wrought in the new birth, energizing sanctification.⁵¹

ing me to this volume). See also W. Hulme, *Counseling and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1956), esp. pp. 179–180, 184, 193–4; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 166.

⁵⁰ W. Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification: Growing in Holiness by Living in Union with Christ* (ed. Bruce H. McRae; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006; reprint), esp. pp. 145–238. According to the book's introduction, John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary considered this to be the most important book on sanctification ever produced. I am grateful to Dan Orr for drawing my attention to this volume.

⁵¹ *Faith and Sanctification*, pp. 82–4. It may be of interest to the reader to note here that both Bavinck (*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pp. 261–2) and Berkouwer (*Faith and Sanctification*, 58–63) view Romans 7:7–25 as describing the experience of one who has been regenerated.

Bavinck is happy to speak of regeneration as ‘the implantation of the spiritual life’.⁵² It is ‘a spiritual renewal of those inner dispositions of humans that from ancient times were called ‘habits’ or ‘qualities.’”⁵³ While he is eager to clarify that these newly infused qualities are a restoration of humanity into God’s image and not a re-creation of something utterly new—a somewhat unique contribution that Bavinck brings to the Reformed table—he remains clearly in the Reformed tradition as he affirms the impartation of a new moral impulse in regeneration.

Berkouwer, however, considers such a notion a regrettable vestigial remnant of Roman Catholicism’s teaching on infused grace.⁵⁴ He is concerned, moreover, that a focus on this alleged new inclination toward holiness will reinforce the wrongheaded notions of ‘improvement’ in Christian spirituality. Such misplaced optimism will in turn undermine the salutary remaining awareness of depravity. While the guilt incurred by such depravity is fully overcome in the gospel, Berkouwer believes that sober consciousness of remaining sinfulness remains critical to healthy Christian living.⁵⁵ While he does see the Christian life as one of growth, this growth is essentially knowledge of 1) one’s own depravity and 2) Christ’s abundant grace which conquers such depravity.⁵⁶ Berkouwer is thus suspicious of explications of sanctification that speak of ethical or moral development rooted in a new spiritual impulse or inclination, and in his interaction with Bavinck regarding the new *habitus* he believes that ‘Bavinck seems to leave himself wholly vulnerable’ on this point.⁵⁷

⁵² *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 76; cf. pp. 83–4. Note also Bavinck’s contrast between Reformed and Lutheran theology and the former’s robust emphasis on regeneration (*ibid.*, p. 243; cf. *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pp. 522–8).

⁵³ *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 94.

⁵⁴ *Faith and Sanctification*, pp. 82–3. Here is a typical statement of Bavinck’s with which Berkouwer would have been uncomfortable: ‘Rome’s doctrine of grace or ‘infused righteousness’ is not incorrect as such; wrong, only, is that it makes infused righteousness the ground for forgiveness and thus builds religion on the basis of morality. But believers do indeed obtain the righteousness of Christ by infusion’ (*Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 249).

⁵⁵ *Faith and Sanctification*, p. 129.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 112, 117 (relying on A. Kuypers), 129. Bavinck too believed progress in holiness included increasing awareness of sinfulness, but neither emphasized this dimension to the degree Berkouwer did nor allowed this dimension to mitigate the need for moral improvement or the reality of the new regeneration-wrought inclination (e.g. *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, p. 257; see also H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 475).

⁵⁷ *Faith and Sanctification*, p. 82.

INCORPORATING EDWARDS?

Is it necessary, however, to choose between the spiritual *habitus* implanted in the new birth (Bavinck) and the growing sense of sinfulness throughout a believer's life (Berkouwer)? We suggest not. Perhaps the single most profound grasp of the new 'taste' given to believers to incline after holiness in regeneration since the reformation belongs to Jonathan Edwards. The point to be made briefly here is that if Berkouwer had more sufficiently incorporated this central contribution of Edwards's theology, he may not have explained sanctification so one-sidedly and yet could have retained his profound insight into the way healthy sanctification focuses on one's free justification.

In numerous writings Edwards argued that a believer's regeneration introduces 'a change made in the views of his mind, and relish of his heart; whereby he apprehends a beauty, glory, and supreme good, in God's nature, as it is in itself'.⁵⁸ True Christians thus necessarily experience some degree of sanctification or moral change due to the fundamental change wrought in the new birth. In as clear and representative a statement as any, Edwards says that

the first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration, is to give the heart a divine taste or sense, to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the divine nature; and indeed this is all the immediate effect of the divine power that there is, this is all the Spirit of God needs to do, in order to a production of all good effects in the soul. If God, by an immediate act of his, gives the soul a relish of the excellency of his own nature, other things will follow of themselves without any further act of the divine power than only what is necessary to uphold the nature of the faculties of the soul.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *Religious Affections* (ed. J. E. Smith; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 241.

⁵⁹ From *A Treatise on Grace*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 21, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith* (ed. S. H. Lee; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 174. Similar statements from the Edwards corpus concerning the new 'taste' granted in regeneration could be multiplied: along with *Religious Affections* and *Treatise on Grace*, see the important sermon 'A Divine and Supernatural Light', in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17, *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733* (ed. M. Valeri; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 405–26. For secondary literature handling Edwards' understanding of the new sense of the heart wrought in regeneration that propels sanctification, see *inter alia* H. Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), esp. pp. 37–40, 60–61, 118–20, 142–3; M. Vetö, 'La connaissance spirituelle selon Jonathan Edwards', *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 111 (1979), pp. 233–45; R. W. Jeñson, *America's Theo-*

Regeneration is the gift, Edwards elsewhere says, of 'a rectified palate,' inaugurating a life of delight-fueled sanctification.⁶⁰ Spiritual taste buds are transformed—not perfectly, but decisively. To be sure, sin remains: 'the godly, after they have grace in their hearts, many times do gradually sink down into very ill frames . . . their lusts prevail'.⁶¹ Nevertheless, in the new birth, that which is good and holy becomes essentially beautiful instead of repulsive. '[A] holy person is led by the Spirit, as he is instructed and led by his holy taste, and disposition of heart'.⁶² Progressive sanctification, in other words, flows out of regeneration. Moral transformation is wrought from the inside out by the vital spiritual metamorphosis wrought by God such that holiness/sanctification now appears attractive.⁶³

While Bavinck did not develop it with the concentrated precision and depth that Edwards did, he affirmed this idea of a new spiritual sense of the heart granted in regeneration that ignites the new desires that impel believers forward in sanctification.⁶⁴ Berkouwer, however, is suspicious of such an idea and, in his zeal to emphasize sanctification's deliberate dependence upon justification, neglects this helpful strand of Reformed teaching on sanctification. Berkouwer should have more satisfactorily incorporated Edwards' notion of the newly awakened attraction to God and holiness wrought in regeneration.⁶⁵

logian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 65–78; W. Wainwright, 'Jonathan Edwards and the Sense of the Heart', *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990), pp. 43–62; G. M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 96–7, 157–8, 286; D. Ortlund, *A New Inner Relish: Christian Motivation in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2008).

⁶⁰ *Religious Affections*, p. 281.

⁶¹ Edwards, 'The Subjects of a First Work of Grace May Need a New Conversion', in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 22, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739–1742*, ed. by H. S. Stout and N. O. Hatch (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 189. Cf. Marsden, *Edwards*, p. 137; Ortlund, *New Inner Relish*, pp. 122–38.

⁶² *Religious Affections*, p. 282.

⁶³ Cf. G. R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 136.

⁶⁴ Bavinck cites Edwards only rarely in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, including only one reference in Bavinck's discussion of regeneration (vol. 4, p. 94 n. 122). Edwards is not cited at all in Bavinck's discussions of either justification and sanctification.

⁶⁵ For a similar critique of Berkouwer's view of sanctification, siding closer to (though without citing) Bavinck, see C. F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 468–9.

A CONCLUDING EVALUATIVE OBSERVATION

At this point we turn to a brief final evaluation of the dimension of Bavinck's and Berkouwer's understanding of sanctification that this essay has sought to illuminate. As has been hinted throughout, we are convinced that Bavinck and Berkouwer articulate an important and neglected insight for the twenty-first century church. Justification is not only relevant for entrance into the people of God and for final acquittal, but, in between these two events, is the critical factor in the mind of the believer for healthy progressive sanctification.⁶⁶

This insight should, however, be placed into the larger soteriological framework of *union with Christ*. As has been argued by many in the tradition to which Bavinck and Berkouwer belong, union with Christ should be seen as the broadest soteriological rubric, within which both justification and sanctification are subsumed.⁶⁷ This is to suggest neither that a robust appropriation of union with Christ is somehow in tension with the Bavinck/Berkouwer insight nor that they overlook union with Christ. Both (Berkouwer to a lesser degree) incorporate union with Christ into

⁶⁶ Though it is beyond the scope of this paper, we believe Galatians to articulate just this vision of justification and its relevance for everyday Christian living. While this epistle has traditionally been associated with *past* entrance into Christian faith, and more recent writers are making the *future* dimension to justification primary in Galatians, e.g. Y.-G. Kwon, *Eschatology in Galatians: Rethinking Paul's Response to the Crisis in Galatia* (WUNT, 2/183; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2004), it appears from the opening verses of Galatians 3 that it is the ongoing lives of believers with which Paul is concerned. Moreover, in dealing with Peter's ethnically alienating withdrawal from table fellowship with gentiles, Paul says *not* that Peter (already a believer!) needed to develop a more sophisticated strategy of progressive sanctification, but that his 'conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel' (2:14)—a 'gospel' that Paul goes on immediately to explicate in terms of justification by faith (2:16–17). The reference to those seeking to be justified by the law in 5:4 seems similarly to be referring to the present lives of believers. Consistently throughout Galatians, then, Paul *primarily* focuses neither on the past event of justification nor the future dimension to justification but the present implications of a justification materially accomplished in the past and yet to be revealed and openly vindicated in the future. Helpful here is M. Silva, 'Eschatological Structures in Galatians', in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry*, ed. by T. E. Schmidt and M. Silva (JSNTSup, 100; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), esp. p. 148.

⁶⁷ See e.g. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.i.1, III.xi.10; Ridderbos, *Paul*, pp. 166–9; Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, pp. 35–52. Cf. Schlatter, *Theology of the Apostles*, pp. 235–6, 245, 248; Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*, pp. 83–94, 130, 138, 145–49, 152–62.

their discussions of sanctification.⁶⁸ Still, these two Dutch thinkers—especially Berkouwer—could have been truer to the soteriology of the NT if they had more self-consciously placed their discussions of ‘sanctification by justification’ within the broader conceptual category of being united to Christ. Paul himself, after all, countered the objection that justification provides a license to sin by first appealing to union with Christ (Rom. 5:20–6:23).

While Bavinck and Berkouwer have an important insight into how sanctification actually works in the daily lives of believers, then, it is not the only thing to be said in a full explication of progressive sanctification. Their insight must itself be incorporated into a broader portrait of salvation in which union with Christ encompasses the other salvific metaphors such as justification, sanctification, reconciliation, adoption, and so on.⁶⁹ It is *in Christ* that believers are both justified (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9) and sanctified (1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11).⁷⁰

Though this is a mild critique, it is more importantly a reminder that this essay has concentrated on only one aspect of Bavinck’s and Berkouwer’s understanding of progressive sanctification. Much more—union with Christ, the Spirit, regeneration—must be incorporated for a theologically holistic portrayal of their understanding of sanctification.

CONCLUSION

Herman Bavinck and G. C. Berkouwer articulate a neglected dimension to progressive sanctification that helpfully speaks to the perennial question of the relationship between justification and sanctification.⁷¹ Both

⁶⁸ See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, pp. 248–51, 263; Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, pp. 107–8, 156–8.

⁶⁹ Gaffin is right, however, to detect something unique about justification within these soteriological metaphors (R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (2d ed.; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), p. 132). Justification communicates most clearly the sheer gratuity and utter objectivity of the God’s gift of salvation.

⁷⁰ The title of a recent volume on justification is appropriate: K. S. Oliphint, ed., *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2007).

⁷¹ The view propounded by Bavinck and Berkouwer holds relevance to Pauline studies and discussions concerning justification within the past few generations. An influential German strand of thought on Pauline justification expounds this doctrine to include within it a transformative element. See (with divergent nuance between them) E. Käsemann, ‘The Righteousness of God in Paul’, in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), pp. 168–82; P. Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification:*

assert that sanctification takes place, counterintuitively, by fixing one's mind on justification. It is deliberate, self-conscious focus on justification, in all its startling freeness, by which one experiences spiritual progress. The same faith that justifies also sanctifies. Berkouwer makes the point more starkly than Bavinck, and in so doing wrongly downplays the new inclination or sense of the heart implanted in regeneration. Had Berkouwer listened more closely to an American strand of his own Reformed tradition (especially Jonathan Edwards), he could have had the more balanced view of Bavinck while retaining his basic point as to the critical role justification plays in ongoing sanctification. And it would be helpful if both Bavinck and Berkouwer placed their understanding of sanctification more explicitly against the broader soteriological backdrop of union with Christ. Nonetheless, Bavinck and Berkouwer share a significant insight into the nature of healthy progressive sanctification—one which wonderfully preserves the centrality of the gospel for all of life.

A Challenge to the New Perspective (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), pp. 62–7; idem, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), pp. 332–4; E. Jünger, *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith. A Theological Study with Ecumenical Purpose* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), pp. 208–11, 259. Similar is M. J. Gorman, who includes within his notion of justification the concept of transformative co-crucifixion with Christ or 'cruciformity', in *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 40, 55, 57, 79. In contrast to these views, Bavinck and Berkouwer would argue that it is precisely by keeping transformation out of justification, and by viewing how utterly absolute the justifying verdict is apart from any transformative element, that transformation is most decisively assured.