

REFLECTION GUIDE

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17* | GROWING UP IN CHRIST, PART 3

*This is our last of four Sundays in this same passage. This week's reflection guide is topical, focusing on one of the major theological themes of this section.

KEY TERMS

Justification - Justification is an act of God in declaring a person to be righteous, or in "right standing" with God, because of one's faith in Christ. Scripture teaches that all people sin and fall short of the God's standard (Ro 3:23), and that no one can justify herself before God with good deeds or religious performance—a person's relationship with God is only restored by trusting that Jesus paid for their sin with his life, death, and resurrection (Ro 6:23).

Sanctification - To "sanctify" something is to "set it apart" or "make it holy." Sanctification is the process of growing more like Christ. Although Christlikeness does not save a person, someone who has been saved evidences this change by pursuing Christlikeness (Eph 2:8-10, Phil 1:6, 1 Peter 1:15).

Glorification - Glorification is the final removal of sin and transformation of nature that will occur for all who have trusted in Christ for justification and will take place when Jesus returns to usher in the new heaven and earth (1 Cor 13:12, Titus 2:13, Phil 3:20-21).

DID YOU KNOW?

Justification was a foundational doctrine Martin Luther sought to elevate with his 95 Theses at the University of Wittenberg in 1517 which aided the launch of the Protestant Reformation which is celebrated on October 31.

BACKGROUND

In Christian circles it's common to hear someone say something like "I've been saved." While there's nothing wrong with the statement "I've been saved"—it's a glorious reality to be saved by Christ!—to speak about salvation as something purely in the past misses some aspects of what Christian salvation really is. Salvation is not just something that only happened in the past for a follower of Jesus. Salvation has past, present, and future elements to it. All three of these elements are present in Colossians 3:1-17. Paul speaks about the past element—justification—when he says *if you have been raised with Christ* (v. 1). This is Paul's way of saying "if you've been saved" or "if you've been justified." He speaks about the present element—sanctification—when he says *put to death therefore... and put on then...* (vv. 5 & 12). Paul doesn't want the Colossian Christians to trust Jesus for forgiveness of sins and new life and then stop believing in that power. He encourages them to grow in their faith and in their Christlikeness. And the future element—glorification—shows up when Paul says *when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory* (v. 4). When Jesus returns, the Colossian Christians—and all Christians across time and space—will finally be made fully new.

GOING DEEPER

Read Ephesians 2:8-10, Philippians 2:12-13, and Galatians 5:13-26. These verses all describe at least one element of salvation. What responsibility do they give to human beings? What responsibility is placed upon God? What encourages you about this tension? What challenges you?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Colossians 3:1-17. After spending several weeks in this passage, what's one thing in these verses that has stretched your thinking?
2. In verse 12, Paul calls believers "God's chosen ones, holy, and beloved." Why does Paul remind the Colossians of their *position* in Christ before directing them to put into *practice* the character of God? Are you beginning to see why this pattern is so foundational to our spiritual growth?
3. Read Luke 18:19-14. Why is the Pharisee the "bad guy" in the parable? How does Jesus' parable warn us of the dangers of pretending or performing in the spiritual life? What do we learn about true repentance from the tax collector?

LIVING THE WORD

4. When you first absorb the statement that "repentance is continual," does that sound positive or negative to you?
5. Reread Colossians 2:13-14 from earlier in our study. When the truth of these verses dwells deeply in our hearts, it will both free us from any neediness to *earn our standing before God* (justification) and also provide the motivation for our *effort in spiritual growth* (sanctification). Is it difficult for you to accept that Jesus nailed your entire debt to the cross marked "Paid in Full"? Why or why not?
6. How would you describe the difference between religious repentance and gospel (or grace-based) repentance?
7. Are you seeing spiritual growth in your life? Are you experiencing an increase in gospel-motivated desire to be sanctified or set apart to God in your character? Why or why not?

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,
rooted and built up in him and established in the faith,
just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

- Colossians 2:6-7