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Evangelical Quarterly

An International Review of Bible and Theology

in Defence of the Historic Christian Faith

Definitive sanctification: a response to John Fesko

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In a recent review of Mark Garcia's monograph, *Life in Christ*,[1] John Fesko claimed that a 'Gaffin-school' reading of Calvin had developed which mistakenly co-ordinated the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification without properly recognising the priority of justification.[2] In a reply, published in the same volume, Richard Gaffin observed that all of the material cited by Fesko concerned progressive rather than definitive sanctification. The logical and temporal priority of justification over progressive sanctification has never been in dispute, Gaffin urged, but rather it is the place of definitive sanctification (the decisive and definitive break with the enslaving power of sin that occurs at the inception of the Christian life) in the *ordo salutis*.[3] Gaffin's reply constituted a challenge to Fesko to articulate what place he saw for definitive sanctification in the *ordo salutis*.[4]

Fesko responded (although not directly addressing Gaffin's challenge) in an article published in last year's *Evangelical Quarterly*.[5] The article addressed the relationship between union, justification and sanctification. In so doing, it helpfully distinguished between the *ordo salutis* and *historia salutis*, noting that justification and sanctification are distinct yet inseparable benefits flowing from our union with Christ. The article also stressed the importance of recognising that sanctification is grounded in Christ's work in us through the Spirit, rather than in our own works to be holy.[6] All this was good, important and cogently

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1 Mark A Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

2 J. V. Fesko, 'A Tale of Two Calvins: A Review Article,' *Ordained Servant*, March 2009, 103-104. Along with Garcia, Fesko also critiques Craig B. Carpenter, 'A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 2 (2002): 363-386; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 'Biblical theology and the Westminster Standards,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 65, no. 2 (2003): 165-179.

3 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 'A Response to John Fesko's Review,' *Ordained Servant*, March 2009, 107.

4 Ibid., 111.

5 J. V. Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ: a Reformed perspective,' *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2010): 197-214.

6 Ibid., 214.

argued. Unfortunately, the tack changed in the final section of the article, where Fesko proceeded to argue for the jettisoning of the doctrine of definitive sanctification on the grounds that it 'muddies the waters' of the *duplex gratia*.[7] This paper seeks to challenge that view.

It is important to note at the outset the limits of the paper. It is primarily a critical review of Fesko's article as it bears upon definitive sanctification. As such, it will not address the other important issues raised by Fesko. Nor will it seek to construct a positive case for definitive sanctification; that has already been ably undertaken elsewhere.[8] Instead, the paper will identify and critique what this author perceives to be the key flaws in Fesko's argument. The paper roughly follows the structure of Fesko's argument. Fesko considers John Murray to be the originator of the doctrine.[9] While this is highly contentious, at least as regards the substance of the doctrine,[10] it is important for us to note since it leads Fesko to focus upon the texts cited by Murray.[11]

I. The sense of *hagiazō* in 1 Corinthians 1:2

The first such text is 1 Cor. 1:2. Fesko argues that Murray's reliance on the text constitutes an exegetical fallacy. Citing D. A. Carson's work, he accuses Murray of imposing a meaning derived from his own systematic theology onto the text.[12] Murray has mistakenly assumed that 'Paul has in view the doctrine of sanctification… when the apostle actually has something else other than the *ordo salutis* in mind.'[13] That something else according to Fesko is the consecration of the church at Corinth as a corporate body. Murray's mistake was to read 1 Cor. 1:2 through an individualistic lens rather than recognising the ecclesial focus of the

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7   Ibid., 197-214.

8   See in particular: John Murray, 'Definitive Sanctification,' in *Collected writings of John Murray Vol.2 Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 277-284; John Murray, 'The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,' in *Collected writings of John Murray Vol.2 Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 285-293; David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 1 (Leicester: Apollos, 1995); Sinclair B Ferguson, 'The Reformed View,' in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald Alexander (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 47-60; Anthony A. Hoekema, 'Reformed View,' in *Five Views on Sanctification* (*Counterpoints: Exploring Theology*), ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), 72-75.

9   Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 207.

10 See the historical discussion in section II.

11 While Fesko cites David Peterson's work once ('Sanctification and union with Christ,' 207), he does not fully engage with the case for definitive sanctification presented by Peterson. This is regrettable since Peterson has provided the fullest recent treatment of the topic.

12 Ibid., 208. Citing D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 45.

13 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 208.

verse. Fesko suggests such a misreading may have been due to Murray's rejection of the distinction between the visible and invisible church.

A number of observations are apposite. Firstly, a grammatical point; Fesko suggests that the perfect participle of the verb *hagiazō* ('I sanctify') 'indicates that this sanctification has already taken place.'[14] This is a vague and inadequate observation. Although older Greek grammars claimed that the perfect tense-form communicates a punctiliar past event with continuing present consequences this view has now been largely discredited.[15] More modern treatments recognise that the perfect depicts a current state of affairs, typically that of the verbal subject, either because the perfect belongs to a stative aspectual category,[16] or because it expresses a stative kind of action (*Aktionsart*).[17] Thus, Fesko's suggestion that the perfect indicates a past action is inadequate. Rather it depicts the current state of believers in Corinth: by virtue of their union with Christ they are now in a state of sanctification.[18] This understanding of the perfect participle clearly lends support to Murray's reading rather than Fesko's.

Secondly, Fesko appears to have misread Carson. In the passage he cites, the target of Carson's criticism are those theologians who assume that *hagiazō* and its cognates always or nearly always refer to the progressive purifying of believers. Carson insists that sanctification 'commonly refers to the initial setting aside of an individual for God at his conversion.'[19] Fesko's account of Carson's argument may mislead since it gives the impression that Carson is critical of Murray's reading of 1 Cor. 1:2 or of definitive sanctification generally. In fact, the exact opposite is true. Elsewhere Carson writes: '*Most* of the places where Paul talks about being "holy" or "sanctified" fall into this positional or definitional camp. That is certainly the case in 1 Corinthians 1:2… The Corinthians *already*

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14 Ibid., 207.

15 For examples of the older view see: Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol 3, Syntax* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 81-83; Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek. Illustrated by Examples… English Edition Adapted from the Fourth Latin Edition by Joseph Smith* (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 96.

16 Stanley E Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 251-259; K. L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: an Aspectual Approach* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

17 Buist M Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 114-117; Constantine R. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (Peter Lang Pub Inc, 2007), 166-175.

18 For a very helpful recent treatment of the significance of the perfect tense-form here, see: Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2010), 55. Otto Procksch maintains that 'sanctification is not a moral action on the part of man, but a divinely effected state' (Procksch in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 112).

19 Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 45.

are sanctified; they have been set apart for God.'[20] The irony is that, in insisting that sanctification can only refer to the progressive transformation of believers, Fesko has himself fallen into the very exegetical fallacy that Carson was seeking to expose. Murray did not make such a mistake. He recognised that *hagiazō* and its cognates have a broad semantic range including sanctification in both its definitive *and* progressive senses.[21]

Of course Fesko does not contend for a progressive sense of *hēgiasmenois* in 1 Cor. 1:2 – this would be implausible in view of the perfective or stative aspect of the verb. Instead his contention is that the participle stands in apposition to *tē ekklēsia tou theou tē ousē en Korinthō* ('the church of God which is at Corinth') and describes the church as a corporate body, having no bearing on the application of redemption to the individual. Fesko is surely right to highlight the corporate emphases of Paul's letter as a whole, but his rigid contrast between the church as a corporate body and the status of its individual members is a false disjunction. Moreover, he fails to observe the significance of the shift in number and gender of the participle. *tē ekklēsia* (a feminine singular noun) is initially qualified by a dative feminine singular participle (*tē ousē*) agreeing in gender and number. It is then followed by a dative masculine plural participle (*hēgiasmenois*), functioning epexegetically in relation to the earlier singular noun. This shift in gender and number is significant. Paul initially stresses the corporate solidarity of the one church in Corinth but then notes the consecrated status of each individual believer.[22] The Corinthian Christians have been set apart as holy and distinct and this carries with it particular responsibilities as Paul will go on to show. The point is further reinforced by Paul's designation of the readers as *hagiois* ('holy ones' or 'saints'), again a masculine plural noun. As Peterson observes, this is shorthand for those who have been sanctified in Christ.[23] So, far from addressing the church in Corinth as an abstract corporate body, *hagiazō* and its cognates in 1 Cor. 1:2 describe the *individuals* who make up that corporate body. They have been sanctified, set apart as holy, when they were incorporated into Christ at their conversion.[24]

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20 D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1998), August 27 entry (emphasis in original). Note also Carson's comments in the series preface to *Possessed by God*: '[Peterson's] aim is to show that much of the New Testament treatment of sanctification stresses what used to be called 'positional sanctification' or the like – and that much godly living, Christian assurance, stable faith and Christian maturity stem from a firm grasp of what the Bible says in this regard' (*Possessed by God*, 7).

21 See for example: John Murray, 'Progressive Sanctification,' in *Collected writings of John Murray Vol.2 Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 294-304; John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), 141-150.

22 See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 76-77; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 56.

23 Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 41.

24 Gordon D. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 32.

Fourthly, Fesko opines that Murray's rejection of the distinction between the visible and invisible church is likely 'a contributing factor in his appeal to 1 Cor. 1:2 in support of definitive sanctification.'[25] This is a red herring fallacy at best. Murray rejected the distinction because, in his view, '"the church" in the New Testament never appears as an invisible entity and therefore may never be *defined* in terms of invisibility.'[26] Murray's rejection was indeed controversial but few can doubt the purity of his motives – he was seeking to counter the use of the distinction as a basis for refusing to pursue unity and fellowship in the visible church.[27] One is at a loss to understand what this has to do with his exegesis of 1 Cor. 1:2 and Fesko does not explain. Perhaps he has in mind Murray's claim that the church should not be defined so widely as to include those who are not really members of Christ's body.[28] If so, Fesko has to defend the view that 1 Cor. 1:2 refers to the church so broadly defined. It will not do simply to refer to 1 Cor. 5:11-13 since it is by no means clear that Paul considers such false professors to be part of the church described in 1:2.[29] Indeed, his command to disassociate and judge those individuals suggests just the contrary. Fesko seems to be using one of the more controversial points in Murray's theology to 'poison the well' and discredit Murray's position on definitive sanctification.

Fifthly, Fesko does not fairly represent Murray's use of 1 Cor. 1:2. For Murray, 1 Cor. 1:2 must be read alongside 1 Cor. 6:11 since in conjunction the verses show that Paul 'co-ordinated their sanctification with effectual calling, with their identity as saints, with regeneration, and with justification.'[30] This co-ordination implies that all four soteriological benefits may be viewed as 'once-for-all definitive acts'.[31] The case is strengthened once the further connection with 1 Cor. 1:30 is recognised.[32] There the apostle Paul observes that, by virtue of his death and resurrection, Christ has become 'to us wisdom from God'.[33] As Fee has shown, the nominatives that follow, 'righteousness', 'sanctification' and 'redemption',

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25 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 208.

26 John Murray, 'The Church: Its Definition in Terms of 'Visible' and 'Invisible' Invalid,' in *Collected writings of John Murray Vol.1 The Claims of Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 234.

27 Ibid., 235.

28 Murray makes this point in relation to 1 Cor. 1:2 in John Murray, 'The Nature and Unity of the Church,' in *Collected writings of John Murray Vol.2 Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 326-327.

29 Fesko cites 1 Cor. 6:11-13 but presumably he had chapter 5 in mind ('Sanctification and union with Christ,' 208).

30 Murray, 'Definitive Sanctification,' 277.

31 Ibid. This is not to discount the progressive sense of sanctification elsewhere, see Murray, 'Progressive Sanctification.'

32 See Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 42-44.

33 This is probably an inceptive use of the aorist passive *egenēthē*. It seems that here there is a parallel with 1 Cor. 15:45: *ho eschatos Adam eis pneuma zōopoioun* ('the last Adam *became* life-giving Spirit'), where the *egeneto* is inferred from context. If so, 1 Cor. 1:30 may provide a preview of the argument in 1 Cor. 15:45, thus confirming that Paul has both Christ's death and resurrection in view as the episode in the historia salutis by which Christ has become for us wisdom from God.

stand in apposition to the noun 'wisdom'.[34] It is not that Christ has been made these four things for believers. Rather, in his death and resurrection God has made him to become wisdom, which is itself righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Moreover, these benefits are received by the believer by virtue of their union with Christ: '*of him you are in Christ Jesus* who has become to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctificaton and redemption.' It is wrong to characterise these as steps in a sequence by which God saves – justification, followed by sanctification, followed by redemption. Rather, as Fee observes, they are 'three different metaphors for the same event (our salvation that was effected in Christ), each taken from a different sphere and each emphasizing a different aspect of the one reality (cf. 6:11).'[35] The three are distinct yet inseparable benefits received through the believer's union with Christ.[36]

At this juncture, a brief excursus is necessary to consider the meaning of *hagiasmos* ('sanctification') in 1 Cor. 1:30.[37] In an influential article, Otto Proksch claimed that *hagiasmos* is a *nomen actionis* (a noun expressing action) derived from the verb *hagiazein*. Thus it signifies 'sanctifying' as a process rather than 'sanctification' as a state. Peterson has shown that the rare LXX usage cited by Proksch does not support this dynamic sense.[38] Moreover, while it is a general rule that nouns ending in *–mos* which are derived from verbs typically refer to the process while nouns ending in *–ma* typically refer to the result, this is only a *general* rule and by no means universally accepted.[39] Numerous exceptions exist as the entries for *hagiasmos* in the major lexicons confirm.[40] Furthermore,

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34 Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 85-86. See also Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 42.

35 Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 86.

36 As Calvin observes, commenting on this passage, 'Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond' (*Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. McNeill, John T., trans. Battles, Ford Lewis, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.16.1).

37 The noun is used on ten occasions in the NT: 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.

38 Peterson writes: 'the noun means sanctification or consecration in a definitive, cultic sense (e.g. Judg. 17:3; Ezek. 45:4; Amos 2:11; Sir. 7:31; 2 Macc. 2:17) or it is used adjectivally in a Hebraic construction like "name of holiness" = "holy name" (Sir. 17:10; cf. 2 Macc. 14:36; Rom. 1:14)' (*Possessed by God*, 140).

39 For an example of the rule, see: A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (Leicester: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 151. James H. Moulton adopts a quite different approach, claiming that *–sis* expresses the verbal abstract, *–mos* generally indicates the state and *–ma* the result of the action (*A Grammar of New Testament Greek Vol. 2, accidence and word-formation with an appendix on semitisms in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1929), 355).

40 The entry in BDAG states: 'personal dedication to the interests of the deity, *holiness, consecration, sanctification*; the use in a moral sense for a process or, more often, its result (the state of being made holy) is peculiar to our lit.' (William Arndt, Frederick W Danker, and Walter Bauer, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10). See also T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), 5.

the resultative cognate *hagiasma* appears to be used specifically in the LXX in a concrete sense to refer to sanctified objects and places and not for the abstract resultant state of sanctification.[41] This may explain why *hagiasmos* does not follow the general rule and is often used to describe the abstract result / state. Whatever the reason, it seems clear from the context of 1 Cor. 1:30 that hagias- mos is not referring to a process of moral change, but rather to a sanctified state resultant of the reader's union with Christ.[42]

Returning to 1 Cor. 1:2, one final point ought to be made in light of Fesko's claim that the doctrine of definitive sanctification lacks historical support. Calvin certainly did not share with Fesko his ecclesial interpretation of the verse. He writes:

> [A]ll who wish to be reckoned among the people of God must be sanc- tified in Christ… This takes place in us when, by the Spirit, we are born again into newness of life, to serve, not the world, but God. For since we are by nature unholy the Spirit sets us apart to God. Because this really takes place when we are ingrafted into the body of Christ, outside of which there is only defilement, and since the Spirit is given to us from Christ only, and not from any other source, Paul rightly says that we are sanctified in Christ, when, through Him, we cleave to God, and in Him are made 'new creations' (2 Cor. 5:17).[43]

For Calvin, *hēgiasmenois* refers to the individual believers at Corinth not to the church as a corporate body. Moreover, the sanctification in view is both transformative and definitive. It occurs at the moment at which they are united to Christ and 'in Him are made 'new creations'.'

II. The historical support for the doctrine of definitive sanctification

Fesko cites passages from the commentaries of Charles Hodge and Calvin as well as from the Westminster Standards to support his claim that the doctrine of definitive sanctification lacks support in the historic witness of the Reformed tradition. We will consider each of these sources in turn.

1. Charles Hodge

Although in places Hodge appears to affirm the doctrine of definitive sanctifica- tion,[44] it is clear from a broader survey of his work that Hodge did indeed view

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41 Of the 67 uses of *hagiasma* in the BGM all but one (Ps 131:18) are in the concrete, usually rendered 'sanctuary'.

42 See Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 44.

43 John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Johnston, William B., Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 18.

44 For example Hodge wrote that we are delivered from slavery to sin 'in no other way than by the death of the inward principle or evil which possesses our nature… and

sanctification as entirely 'a progressive work'; an 'effect of the divine efficiency' to be contrasted with the forensic 'act' of justification.[45] Moreover, he insisted upon both the logical and causal priority of justification over sanctification. For Hodge, justification secures not only delivery from the penalty of sin but delivery from its subjective power as well.[46] Hence Hodge does indeed provide significant support for Fesko's position, asserting both the priority of justification in the *ordo salutis* and implying that sanctification arises from gratitude for justification.[47]

But that is not to say that Hodge faithfully represents the historic witness of the Reformed tradition as a whole. It is well established that Hodge and his nineteenth century contemporaries departed in significant ways from the conception of union with Christ articulated by Calvin.[48] In place of Calvin's doctrine of a mystical, real and spiritual union with Christ's humanity, Hodge adopted a bifurcated conception of union in which he distinguished a forensic and justifying union from a spiritual and sanctifying union.[49] This impacted his discussion of sanctification where he spoke about union having two consequences. Firstly,

which can be destroyed only by union with Christ in his death' (*A commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1886), 191).

45 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 2003), 213.

46 Hodge, *Romans*, 199.

47 All this is tied to larger questions about the soteriological continuity of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions. For Fesko's view see: Fesko, 'Two Calvins,' 98-104; J. V. Fesko, 'Luther on Union with Christ,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 28, no. 2 (2010): 172-176. For similar views emanating from Westminster California and emphasising the priority of justification, see: Michael Scott Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 139-148; Scott Clark, R., 'The Benefits of Christ: Double Justification in Protestant Theology before the Westminster Assembly,' in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spear*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), 133; David VanDrunen, 'The Two Kingdoms and the Ordo Salutis: Life Beyond Judgment and the Question of a Dual Ethic,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (2008): 214-220. For an interesting comparison of the current divisions on Reformed soteriology with those in the 19th century, see William B. Evans, 'Déjà vu all over again? The contemporary Reformed soteriological controversy in historical perspective,' *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 1 (2010): 135-151.

48 See in particular: William B Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 188-227. At the time, see: John Williamson Nevin, 'Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper,' *The Mercersburg Review* 2 (1850): 421-548.; John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence; or a Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (La Vergne, Tenn.: Kessinger Publishing, 2009); John Adger, 'Calvin Defended against Drs Cunningham and Hodge,' *The Southern Presbyterian Review* 27 (1876): 133-166.

49 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:105-106; Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1972), 613-614.

it enables participation in Christ's merits; the imputation of Christ's righteousness for justification which Hodge described as 'the essential preliminary condition of sanctification.'[50] Secondly, it secures the indwelling of the Spirit who 'becomes the source of new spiritual life'.[51] For Hodge, 'the indwelling of the Spirit is the indwelling of Christ',[52] so whereas the work of Christ in his cross and resurrection lies at the heart of justification, it only provides the 'essential preliminary condition' for sanctification which is itself the subsequent work of the Spirit in the believer. This bifurcation of union with a truncated conception of the significance of union *with Christ* in sanctification is not, as we shall see, a view that Calvin would have been comfortable with. Moreover, it led to an exegetical slip in Hodge's treatment of Rom. 6:6. Hodge rendered the verse: 'knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him',[53] and treated it as if it were addressing the believer's current experience of being crucified with Christ with the concomitant Christian duty of daily putting away sin.[54] The context, however, indicates that the 'old man' in view is not the 'old nature' of the believer but rather the believer's solidarity with Adam in the realm of sin.[55] The 'old man' is a redemptive-historical designation rather than an ontological one. Moreover, the aorist passive indicative verb, *synestaurōthē* ('crucified'), conveys the sense that the event of 'crucifixion' is a complete whole rather than an ongoing process as Hodge suggests.[56] Unfortunately, at this point Hodge allowed his soteriological presuppositions to obscure the plain meaning of the text.

2. John Calvin

Fesko cites a single sentence from Calvin's commentary on Rom. 6:2 to support his own position that sanctification is the progressive purifying of Christians grounded in justification.[57] While it is true that this sentence taken in isolation supports Fesko's thesis, it does not do justice to the breadth of Calvin's teaching on sanctification. Earlier in the same paragraph, Calvin writes: 'The truth is rather that believers are never reconciled to God without the gift of regeneration.' For Calvin, 'regeneration' describes what we would today call 'sanctifica-

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50 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:227.

51 Ibid., III:229.

52 Ibid., III:106.

53 Hodge, *Romans*, 196.

54 Hodge writes: 'What was thus done, as it were, out of ourselves, is attended by an analogous spiritual experience' (Hodge, *Romans*, 197). He then cites the exhortations to put off the old man and put on the new in Eph. 4:22, 24 and Col. 3:8-9.

55 Thomas R Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 6 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1998), 315-316; Douglas J Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 373-374.

56 On the aorist tense form, see McKay, *Syntax*, 30-31.

57 'Paul shows the kind of change which ought to follow justification' (*The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1973), 122). Cited at Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 209.

tion' (the two were only distinguished in the 17th century with the development of the *ordo salutis*).[58] This is uncontroversial as Fesko himself recognises that 'for Calvin *regeneration* is the term that contemporary theologians now call *sanctification*'.[59] Thus for Calvin, sanctification is a gift that is received simultaneously with the believer's reconciliation to God, i.e. at the inception of the Christian life. Calvin is even clearer on the nature of and distinction between the definitive and progressive aspects of sanctification later in his commentary: 'Although spiritual death makes continual headway within us [progressive sanctification], yet we are properly said to die once, when Christ reconciles us by his blood to the Father, and regenerates us [definitive sanctification] also at the same time by the power of His Spirit.'[60] Similarly, Calvin writes that Christians have 'died once in order that in the future [they] may cease from sin.'[61] So Calvin incorporates under the one head sanctification in its definitive, progressive and consummate senses. While the form of words adopted by Calvin may differ from those used by Murray, the substance is virtually the same.

This is confirmed when we turn to Calvin's teaching on sanctification in the Institutes. He writes that both mortification and vivification 'happen to us by participation in Christ.' In our regeneration (read sanctification) we have died with Christ so 'that the corruption of original nature may no longer thrive.'[62] The co-ordination of both justification and sanctification as definitive and settled realities is perhaps most clearly expressed in Calvin's famous summary of the *duplex gratia* at 3.11.1:

> Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ's spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.

As Gaffin has remarked, both the parallel syntax of justification and sanctification, as well as Calvin's insistence upon sanctification being the antecedent ground for progressive growth demonstrate that he has sanctification as a definitive state in view.[63]

We must make one further comment on Fesko's supplemental claim concerning the priority of justification over sanctification.[64] This area has already

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58 In Calvin and many other sixteenth century Reformers sanctification, regeneration and repentance were used synonymously (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.9; Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians*, 7-8). See discussion in: Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 4, fn. 7; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 466-467.

59 Fesko, 'Two Calvins,' 100 (emphasis in original).

60 Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians*, 127.

61 Ibid., 128.

62 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.9.

63 Gaffin Jr., 'Response to Fesko,' 111.

64 Implicit in Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 221, and explicit in Fesko, 'Two Calvins,' 98-104.

been well worked over in recent years and the debate continues to rage on.[65] It is sufficient to note that the texts from Calvin that Fesko cites all concern progressive sanctification and, as Gaffin observes, the logical and temporal priority of justification to progressive sanctification has never been in dispute.[66] What is disputed is whether justification is the antecedent ground for sanctification or whether it is union that is the antecedent ground for both justification and (definitive) sanctification, which are themselves received simultaneously and inseparably.[67] It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into a full discussion of the relevant material but it suffices to note that Calvin's comments on the priority of union in 3.1.1, 3.11.1, 3.11.10 and 3.16.1 take structural precedence over his famous justification is "the main hinge on which religion turns" comment in 3.11.1.[68]

3. The Reformed Confessions

Fesko notes that the Westminster Standards refer to justification as an 'act' (SC 33; LC 70) and describe sanctification as a 'work' of God (SC 35; LC 75). He reasons from this that the decisive and definitive breach with the power of sin

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65 See Thomas L. Wenger, 'The new perspective on Calvin: responding to recent Calvin interpretations,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (2007): 311-328; Marcus P. Johnson, 'New or nuanced perspective on Calvin? A reply to Thomas Wenger,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 3 (2008): 543-558; Thomas L. Wenger, 'Theological spectacles and a paradigm of centrality: a reply to Marcus Johnson,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 3 (2008): 559-572; Bruce L. McCormack, 'What's at Stake in the Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West,' in *Justification: what's at stake in the current debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J Treier (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), 81-117; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 'Justification and Union with Christ,' in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall, and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008), 252-260; Gaffin Jr., 'Biblical theology and the Westminster Standards,' 173-179; Lee Gatiss, 'The Inexhaustible Fountain of All Good Things: Union with Christ in Calvin on Ephesians,' *Themelios* 34, no. 2 (2009): 194-206.

66 Gaffin Jr., 'Justification and Union with Christ,' 256; Gaffin Jr., 'Response to Fesko,' 107.

67 Fesko's schema of justification and sanctification is difficult to distinguish from the classical Post-Reformation Lutheran arrangement (John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics: a handbook of doctrinal theology for pastors, teachers, and laymen* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), 319-320; Franz August Otto Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, Vol. II* (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 419-420). See further Tipton's discussion of union and imputation in Post-Reformation Lutheran Theology ("Union with Christ and Justification," in *Justified in Christ God's Plan for us in Justification* (Fearn: Mentor, 2007), 42-45). Fesko's response rather misses the mark since he does not directly engage with the Post-Reformation Lutheran sources noted by Tipton and Gaffin (Fesko, "Luther on Union with Christ," 161-176).

68 See in particular: Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 11-46, 149-252; Gaffin Jr., 'Justification and Union with Christ,' 252-260; Tipton, 'Union with Christ,' 39-42.

'according to the historic witness of the Reformed tradition comes in justification.'[69] The problem with this line of reasoning is that Fesko tries to make the act / work distinction do too much. WCF 13.1 actually describes sanctification in both its definitive and progressive senses. In sanctification 'the whole body of sin is destroyed [definitive sanctification] and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified [progressive sanctification]'. The destruction of the body of sin is an instant, decisive act. The proof texts cited by the Assembly (Rom 6:6, 14) refer to something that has already happened in the past by virtue of the believer's union with Christ in his death and resurrection.[70] They have died to the ruling power of sin; they are no longer under the law but under grace. As Robert Letham observes: 'The picture painted' by chapter 13 of the Confession 'is thoroughly realistic, yet also triumphant in the best sense… It does not hold out false or unrealistic prospects. Yet it displays the hope and promise of growth in grace, and it points back to a decisive change that occurred in union with Christ.'[71]

This exposition of both the definitive and progressive aspects of sanctification is also found in the sixteenth century Reformed confessions. Article 8 of the Geneva Confession 1536 on regeneration (sanctification) states that 'we are by him delivered from servitude to sin, under whose power we were of ourselves held captive, and by this deliverance we are made capable and able to do good works and not otherwise.'[72] Consistent with Calvin's soteriology elsewhere, progressive sanctification is predicated upon a prior definitive breach with the ruling power of sin. Definitive sanctification is also materially (if not formally) present in Article 24 of the Belgic Confession 1561: 'We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from bondage to sin.'[73] Once again Rom. 6 is cited as a proof text for this release 'from bondage to sin'.

Our brief review of the historic witness of the Reformed Church has shown that Fesko's accusation of historical illegitimacy cannot be sustained.

III. Freedom from the power of sin

The third point that Fesko raises concerns Murray's reliance on Rom. 6 and his claim that it is sanctification rather than justification that frees the believer from the realm of sin.[74] Fesko advances his case on two fronts. Firstly, he questions Murray's exegesis of Rom. 6, in particular his treatment of *dedikaiōtai* ('justi-

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69 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 209.
70 The texts are examined in more detail in section III.
71 Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009), 279.
72 Arthur C Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 122.
73 Ibid., 205.
74 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 211.

fied') at 6:7. Secondly, he seeks to establish, from elsewhere in the New Testament, that it is justification rather than sanctification which frees the believer from the power of sin.

1. Romans 6

It is not the purpose of this paper to establish a case for definitive sanctification either from Rom. 6 or elsewhere. Rather, the intention is to defend the doctrine against the specific objections raised by Fesko. While Murray and others have relied heavily upon Rom. 6, Peterson has expounded the doctrine of definitive sanctification while maintaining a very similar exegesis of Rom. 6 to that of Fesko.[75] This is mentioned only to point out that the case for definitive sanctification does not stand or fall on one's exegesis of Rom. 6. Fesko's article might in places appear to suggest otherwise.

Fesko does not dispute that Paul deals with sanctification in Rom. 6:1–7:6;[76] nor does he deny that 'union with Christ affects a definitive breach with the world of sin.'[77] His argument is rather that Murray was mistaken in locating this breach in sanctification. He notes that Murray insisted upon the forensic import of *dikaioō* in 6:7 and, in view of the transformative category being discussed in Rom. 6 (deliverance from the power of sin), he concluded that 'the forensic is present not only in justification but also in that which lies at the basis of sanctification.'[78] Fesko writes that Murray 'moves the forensic into sanctification'.[79] This position is compared with that of Thomas Schreiner who, in his commentary on Rom. 6:7, claims that 'the use of [*dikaioō*] in this context… suggests that righteousness is more than forensic in Paul.'[80] Schreiner, it is urged, makes the opposite mistake of merging sanctification into the forensic. Both, according to Fesko, fail to see that 'Paul's reference is to justification, not sanctification.'[81]

The problem with Fesko's analysis is that he is falling into the very fallacy that he accused Murray of earlier in the article: importing a technical meaning of the verb *dikaioō* into the text without due regard to its surrounding context.

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75 Peterson writes: 'At one level, Romans 6:2-11 is a restatement of the doctrine of justification'(*Possessed by God*, 97) and in relation to Rom. 6:7 he writes: 'The fact that God has "justified" us… is the basis of a new freedom to live as those who have "died to sin", with the possibility of resisting sin in our lives'(*Possessed by God*, 99). (*Possessed by God*, 99). Perhaps his reading of the chapter has been influenced by his reliance upon Cranfield's commentary (acknowledged at *Possessed by God*, 163 fn 11). In particular, this is apparent in his adoption of Cranfield's four senses of death to sin, his handling of *dedikaiōtai* and his treatment of the future tense of *esometha* in v. 5. While Peterson does not follow Cranfield uncritically, the insights of Moo are to be preferred.

76 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 210.

77 Ibid., 209.

78 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New London Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967), 222.

79 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 210.

80 Schreiner, *Romans*, 319.

81 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 211.

It is an example of what James Barr called 'illegitimate totality transfer': 'when the "meaning" of a word (understood as the total series of relations in which it is used in the literature) is read into a particular case as its sense and implication there.'[82] Fesko assumes that *dikaioō* in 6:7 must bear the same sense and implication of the doctrine of justification more generally. This is wrong on a number of grounds.

Firstly, justification and sanctification are often distinguished on the basis that the former is forensic while the latter is transformative. This is an important distinction and it was crucial at the time of the Reformation. But when forensic and transformative are contrasted in this context the contrast is between a legal status grounded upon the imputation of righteousness (justification) and an internal transformation based upon the infusion of righteousness (sanctification). The category of the forensic (which simply means legal) includes justification but is not exhausted by it. Adoption and redemption are also forensic categories in the sense that they are predicated upon a change of legal status. Thus it is quite possible for the forensic to be present in sanctification without abandoning the traditional distinction between the forensic category of justification and the transformative category of sanctification.

Secondly, the rendering of *dikaioō* in 6:7 has long puzzled bible translators and commentators. Fesko asserts that Murray is correct to translate it as 'justified' but the NASB, ESV, KJV, NIV, RSV and NET have all rendered it 'freed' or 'set free'. This is supported by the major lexicons. For example, BDAG lists 6:7 under its third sense: 'to cause someone to be released from personal or institutional claims that are no longer to be considered pertinent or valid, *make free/pure.*'[83] This may be forensic, in that the personal or institutional claims may be legal (as in redemption or adoption), but it does not carry the forensic import of the doctrine of justification. In other words, as Murray suggests, the forensic may lie at the basis of sanctification while sanctification remains fundamentally a transformative category.

Those commentators who argue for *dikaioō* to be understood in its so-called 'genuine Pauline sense' in 6:7,[84] meaning 'justify, acquit', are left to argue that it is our justification 'that is the firm basis of that new freedom to resist the bondage of sin in our practical living.'[85] In other words, justification – our freedom from the guilt and penalty of sin – acts as a psychological spur in the pursuit of holiness. John Piper exemplifies this approach: 'In wakening hope for accept-

82 James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218. See also Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: an Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 25.
83 Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 249.
84 Joseph A Fitzmyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible Commentaries (London: G. Chapman, 1993), 437.
85 C. E. B Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, 6th ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1975), 311.

ance with God by faith alone, it creates the very possibility and foundation for fighting against the bondage of sin that enslaves us.'[86]

This reading is confronted by two difficulties. Firstly, it links justification with the death of the believer – a connection that is drawn nowhere else by Paul.[87] Secondly, it emasculates the teaching of the passage. Paul has been writing about sin as an enslaving realm (note that *tē hamartia* ('sin') is always in the singular and accompanied by the definite article).[88] The previous verse (v.6) has described how the 'old man', the man in solidarity with Adam, has been crucified with Christ. As a consequence (note the *hina* purpose clause), the body of sin, the mode of existence associated with the Adamic order, has been done away with, and the believer has been freed from slavery to the realm of sin. In Moo's words, there has been a 'realm transfer'.[89] Believers have been transferred out of the old era of slavery to sin to which they were bound by virtue of their corporate solidarity with Adam, and into the new era of freedom from the power of sin by virtue of their corporate solidarity with the Second Adam, Christ.

The connective, *gar* (6:7) indicates that v. 7 provides offline material that strengthens or supports the material that precedes it.[90] It is extremely difficult to see how the interpretation offered by Cranfield, Piper and others can do this. Piper suggests his reading supports v.6 because the most insidious and powerful way in which sin enslaves is by its guilt.[91] While it is true that the despair induced by guilt is a constituent part of the enslaving power of sin, that despair is by no means its totality. Moreover, there is a real danger that Piper's interpretation might lead to a psychological re-casting of total depravity in which corruption is said to be located in the guilt that sin induces.[92] Reformed theology has consistently taught that the corruption inherited from Adam is so much more serious and pervasive than this.[93] People don't merely need to be rescued from the guilt

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86 John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 79.

87 Moo, *Romans*, 376.

88 Ibid., 350-352.

89 Ibid., 354.

90 See Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 2010), 52.

91 Piper, *Counted Righteous*, 78.

92 No doubt Piper would not endorse such a re-casting but I struggle to see how his line of reasoning could lead anywhere else.

93 This is not to suggest that sanctification is prior to or more basic than justification. As Calvin maintained, justification and sanctification are distinct yet inseparable benefits of union with Christ received at one and the same time (*Institutes*, 3.11.6). My point is simply that justification cannot do the job of sanctification. Justification addresses the judicial problem of God's righteous wrath against sin. Sanctification addresses the moral problem of inherited corruption. Of course, since justification covers the sins and imperfections of sanctification, I would agree with Fesko, Billings and Gaffin that 'a forensic notion of pardon is the necessary prerequisite for… a life of sanctification' (J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: the Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58; Fesko, 'Two Calvins,' 101; Gaffin Jr., 'Response to Fesko,' 107).

of sin, they need to be rescued from its all-controlling power and this can only be effected through the believer's union with Christ in his death to sin and resurrection to new life (vv. 8-11).[94]

Paul's comments in v. 18 confirm that it is this freedom from sin that is the specific aspect of union with Christ that Paul has in mind: 'and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.' As Sinclair Ferguson has noted, 'the context is clearly one of deliverance from bondage, not alleviation of guilt.'[95] The participle (*eleutherōthentes*) implies such freedom and the passive voice confirms that the believer is the one being acted upon.

In summary, there is little to commend Fesko's reading of Rom. 6:7 as it relies upon the imposition of a technical meaning of *dikaioō* which is difficult, if not impossible, to sustain in the context.

2. Justification as a definitive break with the power of sin

Fesko introduces a number of further texts in support of his view that it is justification rather than sanctification which affects a definitive break with the ruling power of sin. Firstly he notes Rom. 5:18: 'Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.' Fesko writes, 'Paul undoubtedly deals with justification, the forensic declaration that "leads to… life."' Moreover, he insists that this life is not merely a proleptic reference to eternal life but an inaugurated eternal life which begins the moment that the believer is united to Christ by faith.[96] There are two problems with this exegesis. Firstly it is by no means clear that Paul is dealing with *justification* 'that leads to life'. It is the 'one act of righteousness' (*di' henos dikaiōmatos* – Christ's righteous work)[97] that leads to (*eis*) 'justification' and 'life' (*dikaiōsin zōēs*). The genitive *zōēs* may be functioning epexegetically rather than as a genitive of result.[98] If so, 'life' would be explanatory of the forensic state of justification. Even if *zōēs* is a genitive of result, which is probably more likely in view of the contrast between 'justification' and 'life' in v. 21, there is no reason to read 'life' in the way that Fesko suggests.[99] The immediate context is 5:9-10, where the emphasis is upon justification as a present reality leading to salvation from God's wrath on the last day – 'life'.[100] If so, the 'life' to which 'justification' leads in v. 18 is both eschatological and forensic – it is salvation from the penalty of sin at the last judgment. As such it has nothing to do with sanctification or

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94 The *ordo salutis* of the application of sanctification is rooted in the *historia salutis* of Christ's own death to sin and resurrection to life.

95 Ferguson, 'The Reformed View,' 56.

96 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 211.

97 See Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1:289.

98 Turner, *Syntax*, 214; Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, 45; Moo, *Romans*, 341.

99 Fesko resorts to a paraphrase of Eph 2:6 to support his reading with apparently little sensitivity to the different uses of 'life' in Paul ('Sanctification and union with Christ,' 211).

100 Moo, *Romans*, 341. See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 286-287.

release from the enslaving power of sin.

Fesko next constructs a highly condensed argument from Rom. 3:21, 24 and 6:14-15 leading to the conclusion that 'the believer's justification frees her from bondage to the law and brings her into the realm of grace.'[101] The first and second texts state that righteousness has been manifested apart from the law and that justification is a gift. They do not touch upon the question of whether it is justification that has secured release from the law. It is therefore Rom. 6:14-15 that proves to be fundamental for Fesko. His reading of this depends, of course, upon his importation of justification in 6:7, but if that is excluded (as we have urged it should be) his conclusion, concerning the function of justification, is undermined. Fesko next contends that Rom. 3 helps us to understand Paul's teaching in Rom. 7:4. It is 'through justification [that] the believer's marriage to the law as a covenant of works is broken, and with it comes the definitive break from the world of sin.'[102] Having earlier been so emphatic about the need to distinguish the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis*, Fesko now confuses them.[103] It is our union with Christ in his death and resurrection with its realm transferring implications that secures release from the law, not justification.

The second set of texts that Fesko marshals are other occurrences of the syntagma *dikaioō* and *apo*. The primary text is Acts 13:38-39: 'by him everyone who believes is freed (*dikaioutai*) from everything from which you could not be freed (*dikaiōthēnai*) by the law of Moses.' The rendering of *dikaioō* in this verse is notoriously difficult. The ESV, NASB, and RSV have 'freed' while the KJV, NIV and NET have 'justified' or 'justify'. BDAG lists it alongside Rom. 6:7 as an example of the verb carrying the sense of 'make free'.[104] Fesko's argument is a little strange. If *dikaioō* carries the sense of 'justification' here, meaning declared righteous, then the verse has no bearing upon the doctrine of sanctification. It solely addresses justification from the penalty of sin. Fesko's reference to 1 Cor. 15:56 does not help because the context there is the penalty of sin, death. If, on the other hand, *dikaioō* carries the sense of 'freed' then the doctrine of justification is not in view anyway.

The third set of texts is Rom. 1:4 and 1 Tim. 3:16 from which Fesko argues that 'Christ's resurrection is wrapped in forensic significance'. This is uncontroversial as is his further claim that 'the Spirit is involved not only in the transformative but also in the forensic elements of our union with Christ.'[105] That is exactly right although one would want to add that the flesh / Spirit contrast in view is the aeonic contrast between the *sarkic* order of weakness and frailty, and the *pneumatic* order of glory, power and life.[106] As Lane Tipton has observed: 'To

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101 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 211.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 198-200, 203-207.

104 BDAG, 249.

105 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 212.

106 Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 120-121.

speak of Christ as justified in the Spirit invokes his relation to the Spirit-wrought eschatological act of re-creation that dawns in his own resurrection.'[107] Christ's justification by the Spirit in his resurrection is 'the eschatological demonstration and the judicial declaration that the Son of God has been vindicated as righteous.'[108] Fesko starts to get himself into difficulty when he takes the forensic significance of Christ's resurrection in Rom. 1:4 and 1 Tim. 3:16 and reads that into the entirely different context of Christ's resurrection in Rom. 6:4; 8:11. The forensic is an important (indeed absolutely crucial) aspect of the eschatological significance of Christ's resurrection but it does not exhaust that significance. As we observed in our brief study of 1 Cor. 1:30, Christ as crucified and resurrected is in himself 'righteousness', 'sanctification' and 'redemption'.[109] These soteriological benefits are received by the believer distinctly, inseparably and simultaneously in their union with Christ.[110] Fesko commits a serious category error when he insists that the benefits of Christ's resurrection are 'irrefragably tied to our justification, not our sanctification'.[111] Receipt of those benefits are irrefragably tied to our union with Christ in his death and resurrection, not to any one particular aspect of that union.

The final argument that Fesko advances in support of justification being foundational to Rom. 6:1-7:6 is Paul's reference to baptism in vv. 3-4. This can be dealt with fairly briefly since the argument is based upon a premise that has already been dismissed – namely that justification exhausts the eschatological significance of Christ's death and resurrection. It is clear that Paul uses the reference to Christian baptism as a reminder of the Christian's union with Christ; they were baptised 'into Christ Jesus' (*eis Christon Iēsoun*) in a spatial sense – in their union with him.[112] Moreover, as 6:3b makes clear, they were baptised into his death (*eis ton thanaton autou*). In other words, what is in view is the participation of the believer in Christ's death by virtue of their union with him. Verse 4 is connected by *oun* (an inferential particle) making clear that there is close continuity between the two clauses.[113] Since v. 4 introduces participation in Christ's resurrection as the purpose (*hina*) of participating with Christ in his death and burial, it is clear that Paul is using baptism to point to the Christian's union with Christ in his death and resurrection. To claim as Fesko does that 'baptism, when joined to the preaching of the word, visibly preach[es] the sinner's death and

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107 Tipton, 'Union with Christ,' 29.

108 Ibid., 30.

109 After discussing Christ's resurrection as 'justification', Gaffin immediately proceeds to discuss it as 'sanctification' and 'glorification' (*Resurrection and Redemption*, 124-127). Fesko's failure to do this is a serious omission.

110 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.1; Tipton, 'Union with Christ,' 32.

111 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 212.

112 As Moo points out, the closest parallel to the language is Gal. 3:27 where a spatial sense is clearly intended (*Romans*, 360). Also see Schreiner, *Romans*, 307; Herman N Ridderbos, *Paul An Outline of his Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 401-404.

113 See Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 43-48.

justification through union with Christ' is merely to state a conclusion.[114] It rests on the premise that justification exhausts the significance of union with Christ in his death and resurrection. As we have seen, however, that is not the case in Rom. 6, 1 Tim. 3:16, 1 Cor. 1:30 or elsewhere.

Conclusion

Fesko claims that definitive sanctification 'confuses the forensic and transformative categories by taking a statement about justification and moving it under the doctrine of sanctification.'[115] It is a serious accusation and this paper has sought to show that it cannot be sustained. Fesko errs in his interpretation of 1 Cor. 1:2 and Rom. 6:1-7:6, and he lacks the historical support that he claims for his view. At root, Fesko is unable to accommodate the conceptual similarity of a settled forensic state and a settled transformative condition even though both are taught in Scripture. His insistence upon justification securing subjective deliverance from the power of sin is itself a confusion of the forensic and transformative categories. Moreover, a denial of definitive sanctification has both pastoral and theological implications. On the pastoral side, it removes the crucial foundation for holiness: we pursue holiness (progressive sanctification) because we already are holy in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2 – definitive sanctification). On the theological side, as Murray noted, the definitive and decisive nature of sanctification is inextricably tied to the definitive and decisive nature of Christ's own death and resurrection.[116] We cannot deny the former without also undermining the latter and for that reason the stakes in this debate could not be higher.

Abstract

This article responds to the criticisms of definitive sanctification raised by John Fesko in a recent issue of the *Evangelical Quarterly*. It seeks to demonstrate that 1 Cor 1:2, 30, and 6:1 all describe sanctification as a settled definitive state. It further contends that, contrary to Fesko, the doctrine of definitive sanctification has good attestation in the historic witness of the Reformed tradition. In the final part, the article addresses Fesko's claim that it is justification rather than sanctification which frees the believer from the power of sin. It is suggested that this itself is a confusion of the forensic and transformative categories in soteriology and has serious pastoral and theological implications.

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114 Fesko, 'Sanctification and union with Christ,' 213.

115 Ibid.

116 Murray, 'The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,' 293.