Driven By God: Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification in the Soteriology of Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper.

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DRIVEN BY GOD:
ACTIVE JUSTIFICATION AND DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION IN
THE SOTERIOLOGY OF BAVINCK, COMRIE, WITSIUS, AND
KUYPER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
JAE-EUN PARK

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ABSTRACT

For more than two millennia believers have struggled with the antinomy of God’s absolute sovereignty over and man’s ultimate responsibility in justification and sanctification. For at least the past several hundred years theologians have used some version of the terms “active justification” and “definitive sanctification” in an attempt to illuminate this mystery. However, in the past decade scholars have begun to criticize these concepts, saying that they are unsupported in Scripture, lead to theological confusion, and are of no practical benefit to believers.

Through the work of theologians from the broader Dutch Reformed tradition, especially Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), Alexander Comrie (1706-1774), Herman Witsius (1636-1708), and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), this thesis will demonstrate that the terms active justification and definitive sanctification are derived from Scripture and serve to clarify, not obscure the doctrines of justification and sanctification. In addition, the paper will show that neglect, misuse, or misunderstanding of the terms have resulted in contemporary criticisms that are unconvincing and unfounded.

Writings of the aforementioned theologians will define and expound four characteristics held in common between active justification and definitive sanctification, i.e., inseparability: active justification is distinct but also inseparable from passive justification; likewise definitive sanctification is distinct but also inseparable from progressive sanctification (Bavinck); objectivity and decisiveness: justification and sanctification are both grounded solely in God’s objective and decisive decree (Comrie); Christ-centeredness: Christ’s righteousness and holiness are the ultimate source of the
believer’s justification and sanctification (Witsius); and God’s *absolute sovereignty*: the believer’s salvation in all its dimensions is under the gracious, sovereign disposition of our heavenly Father (Kuyper). All four characteristics of active justification and definitive sanctification emphasize the “God-driven” nature of salvation.

This thesis will explain how when properly defined and presented the terms active justification and definitive sanctification are important theologically, bringing clarity to the issue of the perfect balance between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation. The paper will also reveal the practical benefit of these terms to believers who need a deeper understanding of how the dimensions of justification and sanctification can be both distinct and perfectly unified. Finally, the study will show how active justification and definitive sanctification offer true believers practical assurance of their perseverance unto glory, and provide pastors with an invaluable tool for exhorting parishioners who may have lapsed into either triumphalism or defeatism.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction and Thesis Statement

In theological literature the term justification is often used in place of the more precise term “passive” justification, the once-for-all declarative act of forgiveness which takes place in the conscience of the sinner and is logically tied to faith (i.e., sinners are justified by faith).\(^1\) Similarly, the term sanctification often replaces the more explicit term “progressive” sanctification, the believer’s ongoing, lifelong process of becoming holy.\(^2\) For several hundred years, in an effort to dispel confusion and account for all the dimensions of salvation, scholars have advanced and defended the concepts of “active” justification and “definitive” sanctification as necessary corollaries to passive justification and progressive sanctification respectively.

In particular, John Murray (1898-1975), professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (1930-1967) who was influential in American conservative Presbyterian circles, challenged the idea that sanctification is merely the ongoing process lasting a lifetime. He provided two basic reasons for the need for the


concept of *definitive* sanctification.

First, in Murray’s judgment any soteriology that incorporates the idea of human ability or activity into the doctrine of sanctification fails to measure up to biblical truth. Second, in his opinion Scripture itself speaks of sanctification or holiness as definitive, saying that “it is a fact too frequently overlooked that in the New Testament [e.g., 1 Cor 1:2, 6:11, etc.] the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a process, but of a *once-for-all definitive act*” (emphasis added). Through the concept of definitive sanctification, Murray emphasizes that a believer’s union with Christ points to a holiness that is a *fait accompli*. Definitive sanctification also preserves the concept that God is the only source and agent of sanctification.

Meanwhile other Reformed theologians, such as Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), Louis Berkhof (1873-1957), and Francis Turretin (1623-1687) et al. have distinguished

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between the active and passive dimensions of justification to counter the antinomian and neonomian misconceptions that often accompany the traditional doctrine of justification.\(^5\) Antinomianism emphasizes absolutely free justification before faith, thus neglecting the role of human responsibility in justification,\(^6\) while neonomianism emphasizes human responsibility at the expense of God’s sovereignty.

Active (or objective) justification, which takes place \textit{in foro Dei} (in the court of God), logically \textit{precedes} and is the \textit{object} of faith. Passive (or subjective) justification which takes place \textit{in foro conscientiae} (in the court of the sinner’s conscience) logically \textit{follows} faith.\(^7\) This distinction precludes the theologian from seeing justification exclusively one way or the other.


\(^6\) See section 3.4.2 of this study for a detailed discussion on this.

Although the ideas of active justification and definitive sanctification have been widely accepted in conservative evangelical and Reformed circles for many years, they have recently been criticized. For example, J. V. Fesko regards the notion of definitive sanctification as an “unsatisfactory” doctrinal category derived from “exegetical fallacy.” Unlike Fesko, Michael Horton basically accepts the concept of definitive sanctification but he raises questions about where Murray places definitive sanctification


sanctification in the *ordo salutis*. Lane Tipton questions Berkhof’s concept of active justification because he believes that the idea “clouds a clear affirmation of justification *sola fide*” and is at best a “fiction” that has no practical impact on the believer’s life.

Objections to active justification and definitive sanctification fall into three main categories: (1) they lack biblical support; (2) they produce theological confusion; and (3) they provide no practical benefit to believers. Much of the criticism rests on misunderstanding or misapplying the terms.

In response, this thesis asserts that both concepts are supported scripturally, provide theological clarity, and are of practical benefit to believers. This study presents a portrait of salvation that is *God-driven* while still affirming the ways in which human response and responsibility is required. Once misunderstandings are resolved and misapplications removed, both ideas will be shown to be biblically supported, theologically clarifying, and practically edifying.

Active justification and definitive sanctification have a common foundation in the gracious *objective* work of God in Christ on behalf of His own. Sinners are actively and objectively justified (made righteous) *in foro Dei* on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness. Definitive sanctification occurs when believers are decisively sanctified (made holy) *in foro conscientiae* on the basis of Christ’s perfect holiness through

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12 Lane G. Tipton, “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards Revisited: Union with Christ and Justification *Sola Fide*,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 75, no. 1 (January 2013): 9-10. This article is a revised version of Tipton’s inaugural address at Westminster Theological Seminary on November 13, 2012.

mystical union with Him in His death and resurrection. Active justification and definitive sanctification have in common four important characteristics operating in parallel: (1) *Inseparability*: active justification is *inseparable* from passive justification, and definitive sanctification is *inseparable* from progressive sanctification; (2) *Objective and Decisive Salvation*: justification and sanctification are both grounded solely in God’s objective and decisive decree; (3) *Christ-centeredness*: Christ is the heart of believers’ justification and sanctification; and (4) *God’s Sovereignty*: believers’ salvation in all its parts is under the gracious, sovereign disposition of the Heavenly Father.

These will be examined in the soteriology of four theologians from the broader Dutch Reformed tradition: the essential *inseparability* of active and passive justification and definitive and progressive sanctification in Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) in chapter 4; the *objective* and *decisive* character of salvation in Alexander Comrie (1706-1774) in chapter 5; the *Christ-centeredness* of salvation in Herman Witsius (1636-1708) in chapter 6; and *God as gracious sovereign* in salvation in Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) in chapter 7.

This paper will show that the ideas of definitive sanctification and active justification are biblically supported, theologically clarifying, and of practical help to the believer. They effectively remove any confusion between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, give greater assurance to believers about their perseverance to glory, and offer pastoral relief to those who may have lapsed into either triumphalism or defeatism.
1.2. Present Status of the Problem

1.2.1. Definitive Sanctification

Definitive sanctification, sometimes called “positional,”14 “objective,”15 or the “punctiliar” as opposed to the “linear” aspect of sanctification,16 was advocated by Murray.17 Although the idea can be found in prior writers,18 he developed it further using sound theology and scriptural depth.

In contrast to the ongoing lifelong process of progressive sanctification, definitive sanctification holds that believers are already sanctified in a decisive way when they are mystically united with Christ in His death and resurrection. Since the dominion of sin is ended upon the believer’s union with Christ, sin is “no longer en rapport with life.”19 Definitive sanctification is therefore the “once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach with the realm in which sin reigns in and unto death.” Believers definitively and decisively “died to sin” and are “translated into another realm . . .

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18 See, e.g., Nelson, Bible Doctrines, 104; Pearlman, Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible; Harris, Our Faith and Fellowship, 24; Williams, Systematic Theology, 2:256.

[namely] the sphere of life” through union with Christ. Murray finds definitive sanctification in biblical testimonies such as 1 Corinthians 1:2, where believers are “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,” and 1 Corinthians 6:11, where believers were “washed, sanctified, and justified.”

Murray’s proposal has had a mixed reception. Some embrace the idea and use it in their own soteriology. Others object to it because they believe the notion confuses sanctification with justification.

Murray and others including David Peterson are concerned that the progressive aspect of sanctification, i.e., the call for believers to grow in holiness, has been emphasized at the expense of the clear New Testament teaching that in Christ believers are already holy (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2, 1 Cor 6:11, Rom 6:1-7:6, 1 Pet 2:24, etc.). This one-sided emphasis leads to the belief that sanctification is accomplished primarily through human will and effort. Advocates of definitive sanctification are not opposed to

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22 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ.”

23 Peterson, *Possessed by God*.

progressive sanctification, but they also point to Scriptures that support a definitive, objective holiness for believers.

There are also writers who include a semblance of definitive sanctification in their doctrine of sanctification. These divide sanctification into two types—definitive and progressive—and regard them as two sides of the same coin (i.e., “holiness”). Or, alternatively, they understand sanctification as taking place in three stages of an “already but not yet” eschatology: (1) the definitive beginning of sanctification at regeneration; (2) progressive development in this life; (3) completion of sanctification in the eschaton. In this sense, definitive sanctification is understood as one of the multiple aspects of sanctification—represented as the initial inner stage of sanctification. However, none of these have examined definitive sanctification in detail but only in broad strokes as part of a general discussion. A more detailed explanation of the notion of definitive sanctification is therefore called for.

There are also those who are altogether uncomfortable with definitive
sanctification. Fesko is convinced that the notion of definitive sanctification is an “unhelpful” category and an “unsatisfactory” notion in the ordo salutis.31 Fesko holds that the category of definitive sanctification is founded on an exegetical and interpretative fallacy, and if accepted it confuses sanctification with forensic justification. Michael Horton admits that Murray’s idea is theologically helpful and employs it in his own exposition of sanctification.32 Nevertheless, he distances himself from Murray because he thinks that in Murray’s system definitive and progressive sanctification look like two distinct points in the ordo salutis, not two aspects of the same reality.33

Definitive sanctification has been defended by an appeal to crucial New Testament texts34 as well as to sources in the historic Reformed tradition. Scripture passages in defense of definitive sanctification include: 1 Corinthians 1:2.35

31 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 197, 207.


35 Some call attention to the perfect participle form of the verb ἁγιάζω (I sanctify) in 1 Cor 1:2. See, e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner, New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 373; Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 32; Anthony C. Thistlethwaite, The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 76; Peterson, Possessed by God, 40-46.
11 Corinthians 6:11,36 and Romans 6:1-7:6.37

Defense of definitive sanctification also includes an appeal to witnesses from the historic Reformed tradition. Richard Gaffin, adhering closely to Calvin’s Commentary on Romans, labels the idea of definitive sanctification as a “crucial soteriological truth.”38 Ralph Cunnington similarly finds the idea of definitive sanctification in John Calvin and several Reformed Confessions.39 In his dissertation, Mark Snoeberger draws definitive sanctification from John Calvin and John Owen.40 Their proposals are significant but

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38 “This [the idea of definitive sanctification] is the crucial soteriological truth that in the inception of the application of redemption, at the moment sinners are united to Christ by faith, they are delivered from sin’s enslaving power, from bondage to sin as master.” See Richard B. Gaffin, “A Response to John Fesko’s Review,” Ordained Servant 18 (2009): 111. Gaffin’s article is a response to Fesko’s review article, “A Tale of Two Calvins: A Review Article,” Ordained Servant 18 (2009): 98-104. One thing that is lamentable in the debate between Gaffin and Fesko is that the notion of definitive sanctification is highly exploited simply for the purpose of defending their argument. In this appropriation, the notion’s original intention and meaning seems to significantly fade way. As a result, unnecessary confusion and misunderstanding of the notion of definitive sanctification is evident. To avoid this error, the present study will begin by clarifying the very natures of the notion that have been overlooked in the debate. And then, this study will show that a clarified understanding of definitive sanctification provides theological and practical benefits, not confusion.


also of somewhat limited value because opponents such as Fesko also appeal to Calvin.\footnote{Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” passim. Since entering into a scholarly debate on Calvin’s interpretation of Romans is beyond the scope of this study, it will not be dealt with in detail.}

1.2.2. Active Justification

God from eternity, thus equating active justification with eternal justification or even with decree *per se*, they produce the same fruit as the antinomians.\(^{44}\) Emphasizing active justification leads to thinking of justification as an eternal act of God that makes the believer’s act of faith unnecessary and irrelevant.\(^{45}\) It is important to note that the distinction between active justification and passive justification effects a *logical* and not a *temporal* order.\(^{46}\)

Although it is understandable that the idea of active justification has been neglected historically and remains so today, when criticisms are found in contemporary theological literature they often indicate a misunderstanding of it. For example, Timothy Price rather arbitrarily equates active justification with eternal justification.\(^{47}\) Tipton also criticizes Berkhof’s use of active justification, arguing that “if active justification

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logically precedes faith, then active justification logically precedes faith-union with Christ. This is not possible from a biblical and confessional perspective.”

Tipton believes that the concept of active justification denies the truth that “*justification sola fide depends on union with Christ sola fide*” (emphasis in the original).

This study holds that most objections to active justification and definitive sanctification come from conceptual misunderstanding of the terms themselves. When such misunderstandings are removed, the theological and practical validity and value of both ideas become obvious. It appears that no recent studies have undertaken to clarify the meaning of both active justification and definitive sanctification in opposition to the recent criticisms; this paper will endeavor to fill that void.

1.3. Proposed Method

Definitive sanctification and active justification are distinct but complementary. The need for justification speaks to our guilt or unrighteousness, and the need for sanctification speaks to our pollution or unholiness. However, since justification and sanctification are God-driven but also involve human participation in faith and obedience, it follows that the problems, misunderstandings, and misuses of both ideas, though distinct, also correlate. Therefore at the outset we state the conviction that definitive sanctification and active justification have in common the clear understanding that there is a scriptural balance between gracious, divinely sovereign initiative and grateful human response and

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responsibility. To demonstrate this we will examine four parallel characteristics or properties common to active justification and definitive sanctification: Inseparability, Decisive and Objective Salvation, Christ-centeredness, and God’s Sovereignty in Salvation. These parallel properties will show that active justification and definitive sanctification equally affirm that the believer’s salvation is ultimately God-driven. They also maintain that the believer’s justification and sanctification is grounded in an actual, once-for-all reality (“Objectivity” and “Decisiveness” respectively) that is solidly rooted in Christ’s perfect righteousness and holiness (“Christ-centeredness”), bound up and in perfect balance with human responsibility (“Inseparability”) and entirely governed by God’s absolute sovereignty (“God’s Sovereignty in Salvation”). These parallel characteristics of active justification and definitive sanctification display the truth that no one other than God justifies and sanctifies sinners, thus revealing a God-driven salvation.

In this study, each of the four characteristics will be discussed by examining four notable theologians in the broader Dutch Reformed tradition who elucidated the respective characteristics, i.e., Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper.

The first parallel characteristic of active justification and definitive sanctification is that they each are inseparable from passive justification and progressive sanctification, respectively. This inseparability answers the objection that active justification contradicts justification sola fide and the concern that definitive sanctification might

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minimize the importance of progressive sanctification.\textsuperscript{51} While the two dimensions of justification and of sanctification are distinctive, they are never divided. The theological significance and practical benefit of the idea of inseparability will be examined in Bavinck’s soteriology.

The second parallel characteristic in the two ideas is that they both point to a \textit{decisive} and \textit{objective} reality of salvation. Specifically, the objective quality of active justification is often misunderstood as coincident with eternal justification.\textsuperscript{52} However, since active justification must be distinguished from the erroneous idea of eternal justification, this study will present the superiority of active or objective justification as revealed in the writings of Comrie.

The third parallel characteristic of active justification and definitive sanctification is that they are each \textit{Christ-centered}, i.e., the believer’s salvation is established and maintained through mystical union with Christ and His meritorious work of satisfaction. Some critics assert that definitive sanctification creates theological confusion because it either treats sanctification and justification as an amalgam or it erroneously occupies two distinct moments in the \textit{ordo salutis}. These objections are answered by showing that the real value of definitive sanctification lies in its unique ability to describe the condition or state of the believer’s sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness in union with Him rather than merely asserting a particular sequence in the \textit{ordo}. This understanding of the Christ-centeredness of the two concepts is developed in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Cf. Tipton, “Biblical Theology,” 10; Blocher, “Sanctification by Faith?” 64.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Cf. Price, “John Calvin and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Justification,” 148.
\end{itemize}
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Witsius, whose understanding of justification and sanctification emphasizes union with Christ and His meritorious work.

The fourth parallel characteristic shared by active justification and definitive sanctification focuses on *God’s sovereignty in salvation*. In both definitive sanctification and active justification, any role of human merit in salvation is ruled out. Yet this does not mean that the believer’s salvation is deterministic or fatalistic; rather, the point is that believers’ forgiveness and holiness are solely gifts of God’s grace. Even in passive justification where faith is indispensable and in progressive sanctification where human will and activity are required, God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation is always upheld. In this study, the complete reliance on God’s sovereignty in both justification and sanctification will clearly be seen in Kuyper’s soteriology.

By looking at the four parallel characteristics of active justification and definitive sanctification in the soteriology of Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper, the essence of these two ideas will be conceptually clarified, criticisms will be answered, and the theological and practical significance and relevance of active justification and definitive sanctification will be discovered, affirming that every aspect of salvation is God-driven.

1.4. Outline – A Study in Three Parts

Part I – Definitive Sanctification and Active Justification Defined

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Thesis Statement

Chapter 2 – Clarification of terms; outline of Murray’s view of definitive sanctification; comparison with progressive sanctification; close examination of biblical
texts (esp., Rom 6:1-14, 1 Cor 1:2, and 6:11) and confessional evidence (Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Confession of Faith); the essence of definitive sanctification as found in Swiss-Italian Reformed theologian Francis Turretin (1623-1687); introduction to recent doctrinal objections to the idea (Fesko) and initial response to his criticisms. The main purpose of chapter 2 is to clarify the meaning, scope, and validity of definitive sanctification in order to resolve misconceptions and misunderstanding.

Chapter 3 – Clarification of the difference between active justification and passive justification; examination of the biblical foundation (esp., Gen 3:15); explanation of its doctrinal development and historical context; introduction to another recent doctrinal objection (Tipton); examination of theological neglect (John Eaton in the tradition of English antinomianism) and misuse or abuse of the concept (John Brine in the tradition of hyper-Calvinism); initial response to criticism, neglect, and misuse.

Part II – “Four Parallel Characteristics of Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification,” includes four theologians who each elucidate one of the parallels, i.e., Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper.

Chapter 4 – Examine the first parallel characteristic of definitive sanctification and active justification (“Inseparability”) as revealed in the soteriology of Bavinck. Just as divine initiative and sovereignty is inseparable from human responsibility to believe and obey, so active justification is inseparable from passive justification and definitive sanctification inseparable from progressive sanctification. This inseparability found in Bavinck’s soteriology is necessary to refute objections that fail to take it into account.

Chapter 5 – Examine the second parallel characteristic, “The Decisive and Objective Reality of Salvation,” through the lens of Alexander Comrie’s soteriology.
Chapter 6 – Examine the third parallel characteristic, “Christ-centeredness,” through the soteriology of Herman Witsius, particularly his understanding that definitive sanctification is not a distinct element in the “order” or “sequence” in salvation, but rather a “condition” or “state” of being definitively sanctified in union with Christ and sharing in His holiness.

Chapter 7 – Examine the fourth parallel characteristic, “God’s Sovereignty in Salvation,” as found in the soteriology of Abraham Kuyper as he considers the ceaseless struggle to maintain a clear view of God’s total control of salvation, seen within the context of the highly anthropocentric culture and society of his time.

Part III – “The Soteriological Significance of Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification”

Chapter 8 – The theological and practical significance of definitive sanctification and active justification. Divine initiative and sovereignty in grace are placed in proper relation to human responsibility, affording assurance of perseverance to believers while avoiding either defeatism or triumphalism.

Chapter 9 – Summary of the case: once objections are refuted, misunderstandings removed, and misuses resolved, the concepts of active justification and definitive sanctification are found to be biblically supported, theologically clear and necessary, and of great practical benefit to believers.
PART I

DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION AND ACTIVE JUSTIFICATION DEFINED
CHAPTER 2
DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION

Before going on to the four characteristics of definitive sanctification, it is essential to have the idea itself clearly defined. This chapter will analyze definitive sanctification by summarizing the work of John Murray, its chief representative, and stating and answering key differences to his concept as expressed by John Fesko and Michael Horton. This chapter will examine biblical texts including Romans 6:1-14 and 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11, two confessional documents (Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Confession of Faith), and the theology of Reformed scholastic theologian Francis Turretin (1623-1687).

2.1. Clarification of Terms

Definitive sanctification has been called a variety of names with little actual variation in meaning. It has been called “positional,”¹ “objective,”² and “judicial,”³ and even the “indicative” of sanctification.⁴ It has also been graphically expressed as “punctiliar” in contrast to “linear” sanctification.⁵ Others use the comprehensive term “initial

³ Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, 407.
sanctification.”

The major differences between definitive and positional sanctification have already been thoroughly studied and a brief summary will suffice here. However, in properly defining definitive sanctification we must still call attention to subtle but important nuances in the idea of “positional” sanctification, a term coined by the Keswick movement. It refers to the way that believers are positionally set apart for God through union with Christ, and an old entity, i.e., the sinful nature, is supplemented but not replaced by a new entity, i.e., the sanctified nature through the second crisis event or “second blessing” of the Holy Spirit. Through this second blessing believers receive the enablement or potential power (something less than an active or accomplished power) to

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9 Keswick is the name of a resort town in England’s lake district where annual conventions “for the promotion of practical holiness” have been held since 1875. According to Barabas, the best summary of the Keswick message is expressed in the “call” to the original convention—a “Convention for the Promotion of Practical Holiness.” Further said: “It [Keswick] shows that in Christ there is provided for every believer victory, liberty, and rest, and that this may be obtained not by a life-long struggle after an impossible ideal but by the surrender of the individual to God, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.” See Steven Barabas, So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1952), 21, 84, 108. For a typical devotional exposition of Keswick teaching, see Robert C. McQuilkin, The Life of Victory and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953). For vigorous criticism of Keswick teaching, see Benjamin B. Warfield, Perfectionism, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), passim; Packer, Keep in Step with the Spirit, passim.
become “saints” and to be “holy.”

The term “positional” was used slightly differently by dispensationalist Lewis Sperry Chafer, who implied that the believer is not only a participant but the primary agent of sanctification. Benjamin Warfield criticized this view as a form of Pelagianism.

However, John Murray defines definitive sanctification as taught by the Reformed tradition. As such it is unlike any form of positional sanctification that either calls for a necessary second blessing of the Holy Spirit or suggests greater confidence in human ability to achieve sanctification. In fact, Warfield referred to the latter type as the “quintessence of Arminianism.” Neither of these ideas are part of the understanding of definitive sanctification that will be defined and defended in this dissertation, which

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12 Benjamin B. Warfield, “Review of He That Is Spiritual,” Princeton Theological Review 17.2 (1919): 322–327; idem, Perfectionism. For an extensive exposition concerning the old Princeton Presbyterian response to the Holiness movement, see Cho, “The Old Princeton Presbyterian Response to the Holiness Movement in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in America.” Yet, some (e.g., Charles C. Ryrie) do not agree with this evaluation, arguing that “the Reformed and Chaferian views are not very far apart in what is taught concerning the relationship between human activity and divine sovereignty.” See Ryrie, “Contrasting Views of Sanctification,” 194-195.


concentrates on and is in accord with Murray’s view.

2.2. John Murray’s View of Definitive Sanctification

2.2.1. Views that Differ from Murray’s

John Murray’s definitive sanctification was quite different from the human-centered definitions presented by some of his contemporaries. First, Murray pointed out theological weaknesses in the positional sanctification of the dispensationalist Keswick movement or Chaferian interpretation. He not only emphasized accomplished (determined) initial sanctification, but he also held to an ultimate divine superintendent of sanctification as opposed to a human agent.

Second, Murray also differentiated himself from his brethren in the traditional American Presbyterian circle who treated sanctification as being predominantly progressive. In Murray’s own words, “It is a fact too frequently overlooked that in the New Testament the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a

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15 Note that it is no exaggeration to say that Murray is the well-established founder of the conception of definitive sanctification. As a result of Murray’s extensive introduction to the concept, the idea of definitive sanctification is shaped as a concrete theological conception and discussed among other writings in earnest.

16 Not only Barabas’ *So Great Salvation* and Chafer’s *Systematic Theology* as discussed above, but also other works already discussed the concept of positional sanctification. Before that Murray dealt with it in earnest. See, e.g., Nelson, *Bible Doctrines*, 104; Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*; Harris, *Our Faith and Fellowship*, 24; Williams, *Systematic Theology*, 2:256.


process, but of a once-for-all *definitive* act” (emphasis added).¹⁹

2.2.2. Definition and Two Main Themes: *Identity* and *Lordship*

In contrast to the widely-accepted idea that sanctification is primarily a lifelong, progressive process, Murray maintained that believers *are* sanctified in the definitive sense when they are mystically united with Christ in His death and resurrection. Definitive sanctification therefore describes a “once-for-all definitive and irreversible break with the realm in which sin reigns in and unto death.” Through union with Christ believers definitively and decisively “died to sin” and were “translated into another realm . . . [namely] the sphere of life.”²⁰ This definitive severance from sin brings about *objective, active, actual,* and *experiential* change which is effectively and efficiently performed in one’s inner and outer Christian life.²¹ Thus Murray can say, “This [definitive sanctification] means that there is a decisive and definitive break with the power and service of sin in the case of everyone who has come under the control of the provisions of grace.”²²

Two important consequences flow from this theological idea. First, definitive sanctification clearly identifies those who are redeemed in Christ. It reminds believers that although their battle with sin continues and they may lapse on occasion, they remain

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the “people of God…” who were “…called effectually by God’s grace” (1 Cor 1:2, 6:11). The term therefore gives believers unshakable confidence in their true identity.

Second, definitive sanctification connotes the deliverance of believers from bondage to sin. Romans 6:12-22 is crucial for Murray; to be “holy in Christ” means that believers are no longer “dead in sin” but are now “dead to sin.” Sin no longer holds dominion; the old sinful man has been crucified and the body of sin destroyed. Believers no longer serve sin, and it no longer reigns in their mortal bodies; they are now and forevermore under the reign of grace. This eradication of sin’s power and rule is neither illusory nor superficial but *is actual, comprehensive and experiential.* Murray sees that in Romans 6 Paul “is dealing with the believers’ actual death to sin [emphasis added].” Believers definitively and substantively break with sin; the old self is radically replaced (not just supplemented) by the new self which is given efficient and active power to be holy.

Definitive sanctification is not to be confused with “sinless perfection” in the Wesleyan sense. Taking a favorite text of perfectionists, 1 John 3:9 “Those who have...

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27 Since a more extensive discussion of Wesleyan perfectionism, which is related with definitive sanctification, is beyond the scope, this study will not deal with it in detail. For this, see Jesse A. Reeder, “Definitive Sanctification: A Needed Component in Resolving the Johannine Perfectionism Puzzle of 1 John” (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009); Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” 94-133. For a detailed exposition on Wesley’s idea of Christian perfection, see John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth, 1953).
been born of God do not sin, because God’s seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God,"

Murray declares simply and directly that “…sinless perfection is not John’s meaning.” Instead, Murray asserts that the main themes of definitive sanctification, i.e., *identity* and *lordship*, provide credible alternative explanations. While sinless perfection is not possible, even the persistent presence of sin cannot change the *identity* of those who are in Christ, but for them the dominion of sin is broken. Believers are no longer “slaves to sin.”

2.2.3. Union with Christ and the Agency of Definitive Sanctification

For Murray, union with Christ is the alpha and omega for defining, defending, and deepening the meaning of definitive sanctification. Murray brings union with Christ to the forefront, not only to eliminate any reliance on human merit, but also to elevate the theological standing of definitive sanctification so that we might use it to better understand the doctrine of sanctification itself.

Murray sees that “[t]he bearing of Jesus’s death and resurrection upon our justification has been in the forefront of Protestant teaching.” However, he is concerned that “…its bearing upon sanctification has not been sufficiently appreciated.” He is especially concerned that Christ’s death and resurrection is too often connected

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28 The Bible passage that is quoted in the present study is NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

29 Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” 281. In order to solve the Johannine Perfectionism puzzle of 1 John, Reeder’s thesis is helpful. Reeder tries to borrow the notion of definitive sanctification and then look at the Johannine texts in the threefold eschatological perspective on sanctification: definitive (initial), progressive, and final or complete sanctification. See Reeder, “Definitive Sanctification,” passim.

more to justification than sanctification. He is certain that in the arena of sanctification, it is “proper . . . to focus attention upon the action of Christ” (emphasis added). Murray specifically attaches the core meaning of union with Christ to the idea of definitive sanctification:

It [definitive sanctification] is by virtue of our having died with Christ, and our being raised with him in his resurrection from the dead, that the decisive break with sin in its power, control, and defilement has been wrought, and that the reason for this is that Christ in his death and resurrection broke the power of sin, triumphed over the god of this world, the prince of darkness, executed judgment upon the world and its ruler, and by that victory delivered all those who were united to him from the power of darkness, and translated them into his own kingdom. So intimate is the union between Christ and his people, that they were partakers with him in all these triumphal achievements, and therefore died to sin, rose with Christ in the power of his resurrection, and have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. As the death and resurrection are central in the whole process of redemptive accomplishment, so are they central in that by which sanctification itself is wrought in the hearts and lives of God’s people [emphasis added].

Death to sin (mortification) and a new sanctifying life (vivification) both happen in conjunction with and as a consequence of the believer’s intimate union with Christ’s death and resurrection. Historical events, i.e., Christ’s decisive and definitive death and resurrection, are not just locked in the past, but find their expression again in the realm of

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one’s life experience *through vital spiritual union with Christ.* In Murray’s words: “The truth is that our death to sin and newness of life are effected in our identification with Christ in his death and resurrection.” As Murray puts it, the objective reality of Christ’s death and resurrection “…must not be allowed to impair or tone down [undermine] the reality of [it] in God’s reckoning,” but at the same time His death and resurrection must also be amplified and applied to the subjective reality of our new life in union with Christ, or again as Murray said, “…in the actual constitution established by him [God] in the union of his people with Christ.” Thus due emphasis is placed upon *both* the “objective and subjective in our dying and rising again with Christ [and] in his death to sin and living again to God.”

Murray sees that union with Christ is key in sanctification, leaning heavily on that theme in “The Agency in Definitive Sanctification.” He makes it abundantly clear that in definitive sanctification human beings are not the primary agents but rather are *partakers of or participants in* union with Christ that marks a definitive and decisive break with sin. Although human participation through will and action is included in union

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34 Murray further notes: “The apostle constantly interweaves the most explicit references to the death and resurrection of Christ as once-for-all historic events with the teaching respecting actual, experiential death to sin on the part of the believer. . . . This sustained introduction of the once-for-all past historical in a context that clearly deals with what occurs actually and practically in the life-history of individuals makes inevitable the interpretation that the past historical conditions the continuously existential, not simply as laying the basis for it, and as providing the analogy in the realm of the past historical for what continues to occur in the realm of our experience, but conditions the latter for the reason that something occurred in the past historical which makes necessary what is realized and exemplified in the actual life-history of these same persons.” See Murray, “The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,” 291-292.


with Christ, it does not follow that definitive sanctification is primarily performed by human agency. Rather, humans act as secondary agents that take part in the action and effect of the primary divine agent. Murray notes, “[In] progressive sanctification the basic consideration is that we must realize increasingly the implications of union and communion with Christ, and of communication from him.”

For Murray, Christ’s works (death and resurrection), and the believer’s union with those works are the ultimate foundation and performing agency of both definitive and progressive sanctification. It is a more important condition than any other. In contrast, others understood sanctification to be accomplished as only the progressive, lifelong human effort. In opposition Murray assures us that strictly speaking “there is no need of [our effort],” at least as the starting point or efficient cause to be holy. This does not completely depreciate the role of the human in the sphere of sanctification, but rather it highlights the point where sanctification ultimately begins as well as the primary agency that fundamentally leads the believer along on his sanctifying pilgrimage. For Murray, the beginning point and agency of sanctification is Christ and His works, not humankind and our ability or efforts.

2.2.4. Definitive Sanctification and Progressive Sanctification

Some critics believe that the notion of definitive sanctification deemphasizes or

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38 Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 304.
minimizes progressive sanctification,\textsuperscript{41} but in fact, affirming definitive sanctification is part of Murray’s intent to promote, not inhibit the believer’s growth in holiness.\textsuperscript{42}

Murray writes that the believer “is not so delivered from sin in its lust and defilement [that he need not be] actively engaged in the business of the slaughterhouse with reference to his own sins.”\textsuperscript{43} That is, the condition of the believer in this life is not one of maintaining the status quo, but is one of progressive holiness.\textsuperscript{44} Murray brings out two points that the dimension of progressive sanctification embodies.

First, the progression of sanctification is both positive and negative in character; it embraces both mortification (dying to sin) and sanctification (vivification).\textsuperscript{45} Even though mortification connotes “passivity” in sanctification in the sense that believers are “dead to sin” by union with Christ (Rom 6:2; Col 2:20; Rom 7:4), mortification also involves “activity” in that “[w]e ourselves [must] be actively engaged in cleansing ourselves from that defilement, just as on the more positive side, we are to [seek] perfect

\textsuperscript{41} For example, Henri Blocher claims that emphasizing the dimension of definitive sanctification could bring about minimizing the moral progressive dimension of sanctification. See Blocher, “Sanctification by Faith?,” 59n9.

\textsuperscript{42} Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 294-304.

\textsuperscript{43} Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 296.

\textsuperscript{44} Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 295.

holiness in the fear of God [2 Cor 7:1]."\(^{46}\) Mortification has two aspects, i.e., it is done through union with Christ (definitive sanctification), but must still be actively performed in this life (progressive sanctification).

The nature of progressive sanctification can be expressed in a single word: “growth.” Murray recalls Ephesians 4:15 (“speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ”) which shows the aim of growth (to be like Christ “in every way”), the necessity of growth (we “must grow up” into the fullness of His stature), and the way of growth (through “speaking the truth in love”).\(^{47}\)

With knowledge and love at the core of progressive sanctification, Murray sees that these are interwoven (Eph 1:17; 4:13-15; 2 Pet 3:18).\(^{48}\) Since “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 John 4:16), love is “fed by the increasing apprehension of the glory of him who is love, and of him in whom the love of God is manifested.”\(^{49}\) If the purpose of progressive sanctification is the increase of the fruit of the Spirit in love, joy, and peace, it follows that we can expect to be increasing in the knowledge of God in love. This is how we practice the new life in Christ.

Second, sanctification is not merely related to the individual, but to the ecclesiastic community as well. Murray emphasizes the nature of “fellowship” in progressive sanctification, saying that “progression has respect, not only to the individual,

\(^{46}\) Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 296.

\(^{47}\) Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 298.

\(^{48}\) Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 298-299. See also Murray, Redemption, Accomplished and Applied, 184-186.

\(^{49}\) Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 299.
but also to the church in its unity and solidarity as the body of Christ.” Murray notes that believers “have never existed as independent units,” for in God’s eternal counsel “they were chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:4); in the accomplishment of their redemption they were in Christ (2 Cor. 5:14-15; Eph. 1:7); in the application of redemption they are ushered into the fellowship of Christ (1 Cor. 1:9).” If individuals as members of Christ’s body are indifferent to the sanctification of others, it is not only the “absence of the ministry which [it] should have afforded others” but also a “vice that gnaws at the root of spiritual growth.” Murray therefore stresses that interaction within the fellowship of the saints should become an integral part of the progressive sanctification of the people of God: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). Since the church is the fullness of Christ (Eph 1:23) and the goal of progressive sanctification is participation in the fullness of Christ (Col 1:19), progressive sanctification should be performed in ecclesiastic community and fellowship. This is why Murray underlines the need for “fellowship” to fulfill progressive sanctification.

When Murray elucidates definitive sanctification, he does not neglect the dimension of progressive sanctification. Rather, Murray affirms the importance of both individual and ecclesiastical progressive sanctification in the outworking of mortification

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50 Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 299.
51 Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 299.
52 Murray, “Progressive Sanctification,” 300.
actively dead to sin) and vivification (abiding in the truth in love).

2.3. Defending the Idea of Definitive Sanctification

Now that we have defined definitive sanctification and summarized Murray’s understanding of it, we shall set forth a more comprehensive defense. This section will begin by examining three key biblical passages that Murray himself used, Romans 6:1-14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, and 1 Corinthians 6:11; then examine the Reformed and Presbyterian confessions for allusions to the idea, and finally consider whether there is a corollary to definitive sanctification in Francis Turretin’s idea of “passive sanctification.”

Note that a full biblical defense of definitive sanctification, a complete
examination of the Reformed confessional and theological traditions, and a comprehensive study of Francis Turretin are beyond the scope of this paper; this section intends only to present sufficient evidence from each source to make a reasonable case for definitive sanctification.

2.3.1. The Biblical Case for Definitive Sanctification

Murray derived definitive sanctification from scriptural texts and biblical principles, using Romans 6:1-14, 1 Corinthians 1:2, and 1 Corinthians 6:11 as the main texts supporting the idea. Later writers have focused on three crucial questions: First, can definitive sanctification legitimately be extracted from Romans 6:1-14 (specifically Rom 6:2, 6:6, and 6:14a) in that the verses speak of lordship and the ultimate dominion of Christ over believers. Second, can “ἡγιάσθητε,” “ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις” (“... to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...,” 1 Cor 1:2) refer to definitive sanctification in that the passage is closely related to a believer’s definitive “status” in union with Christ. Third, how do we understand “ἀλλὰ ἢγιάσθητε, ἀλλὰ ἡγιάσθητε ἐν τῷ ὅνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” (“... but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus” and _cathartic_ in nature as being “cleansed from the defilements of sin.” See Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” 87-92.

55 Note that since the present study is not primarily a biblical study, a full exposition to find biblical supporting evidences for the definitive sanctification is beyond the scope. On this, Peterson and Snoeberger’s work are helpful: Peterson, _Possessed by God_; Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” 194-279 (esp., ch.7).

Christ,” 1 Cor 6:11) in the context of definitive sanctification in that the passage speaks of actions completed in the past. In fact, all of these passages do speak of a sanctification which is decisive not progressive, and they call out the believers’ *identity/status* and *lordship/dominion* in union with Christ which are the main characteristics of definitive sanctification.

2.3.1.1. Romans 6:1-14 and Definitive Sanctification

The idea of definitive sanctification can be found in Romans 6:1-14; these verses speak not only of justification but also of sanctification which is closely related to the lordship and dominion of Christ over believers. Two exegetical discussions support this argument: (1) Romans 6:1-14 concerns *both* justification and sanctification; and (2) Romans 6:2, 6:6, and 6:14a refer directly to lordship of believers in Christ.

First, biblical scholars have found that the “subject matter” of Romans 6:1-14 is a believer’s “change of realm through union with Christ” and a “freedom from sin’s tyranny,” or “recasting both ideas of sanctification (indicative and imperative) in

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57 For a more detailed discussion on this, see Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 93-114; Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” 194-279 (esp., ch.7).

58 Moo observes that “since, in terms of salvation history, the realm of Christ has been instituted after that of Adam, we can also speak in temporal categories and call the realm of Adam the ‘old age’ or ‘aeon’ and that of Christ the ‘new age’ or ‘aeon.’ This concept is a basic premise of much of what Paul has to say in Rom. 6, 7, and 8). . . . For he now ‘personalized’ this ‘two-realm’ or ‘two-age’ conception by proclaiming that believers are ‘transferred’ from the one realm to the other and by showing how this transfer creates a new relationship to sin (chap. 6) and the law (chap. 7).” See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 352.

connection to justification,” 60 or the “meaning of the believer’s sanctification,” 61 etc. 

Even though the emphasis may be somewhat different, the general consensus among scholars is that Romans 6:1-14 applies to believers who experience a *duplex beneficium* of justification and sanctification in uniting with Christ (indicative sense) and who are called to “[bear] Christian fruits” (imperative sense) as a spiritual response to their “indicative” condition. Interestingly, both the active opponents (e.g., Fesko 62) and proponents of definitive sanctification (e.g., Peterson and Cunnington 63) tend to join this scholarly consensus but from different directions. For example, Fesko reasons that the foundation and hermeneutical center of gravity of Romans 6:1-14 (or Rom. 6:1-7:6) is forensic justification. 64 Peterson agrees that Romans 6 is fundamentally based on the judicial or forensic, but he also asserts that Romans 6 has “often been characterized as a classic statement of the doctrine [of sanctification].” 65 In other words, whereas opponents of active justification and definitive sanctification tend to interpret Romans 6:1-14 as a story of “justification,” proponents interpret it as primarily a story of “sanctification.” In fact both own the truth, so the view of Romans 6:6-14 by one party

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60 Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 429-430. In Fitzmyer’s own words: “Paul . . . contrasts the indicative (you are a Christian!) with the imperative (become the Christian that you have been enabled to become!): you have died to sin, so put to death the old self! You have been raised with Christ, so live a new life with him! Thus, the physical life that a justified person lives has to be lived out consciously in faith.” See Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 430. Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 352.


62 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 197-214. The next subsection will deal with Fesko’s criticism on the idea of definitive sanctification in detail.

63 Peterson, *Possessed by God*; Cunnington, “Definitive Sanctification.”

64 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 212.

must not be discounted merely to lay the groundwork for the other’s argument. As Moo observes, in a real sense Romans 6 shows both aspects, that “the new status enjoyed by the believer (justification) brings with it a new influence and power that has led and must lead to a new way of life (sanctification).”66 Thus the subject matter of Romans 6:1-14 is not only justification but also sanctification.

Second, Romans 6:2 (“dead to sin”), 6:6 (“[the] old self was crucified”), and 6:14a (“sin will have no dominion over you”) support the idea of definitive sanctification in that they include the lordship and dominion of Christ over believers. Two possible interpretations have been put forward: realistic and idealistic.67 C. E. B. Cranfield, who interprets the expression “dead to sin” in the idealistic sense, understands it in terms of four possible hermeneutical categories: judicial, baptismal, moral, and literal or eschatological.68 For Cranfield the meaning of a believer being “dead to sin” is close to the baptismal sense in that believers, having been sealed by God’s gracious decision, have in fact “died to sin.”69 However, he also sees that the forensic or judicial interpretation of “dead to sin” is “more probable” than the baptismal.70 Cranfield reasons that believers “died to sin in God’s sight [the less realistic interpretation] when Christ

66 Moo, Romans, 352. See also Murray, Romans, 1:211-226.

67 For a detailed discussion on this, see Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” 203-227.

68 Cranfield, Romans, 1:299-300. Cf. Schreiner, Romans, 348–349; Peterson, Possessed by God, 97-98.

69 Cranfield, Romans, 1:309.

70 Cranfield, Romans, 1:209-300. Contra Cranfield, Schreiner holds that “[t]his [Cranfield’s endorsement for judicial sense] is not persuasive either. The focus in Rom 6 is not on the penalty of sin but on its power. What Paul argues is that the dominion of sin has been broken in the life of the believer. We ‘walk in newness of life’ (v.4).” See Schreiner, Romans, 349.
died on the cross for them. This is a matter of God’s decision.”\textsuperscript{71} In the idealistic
interpretation, the phrase “old self was crucified” (v. 6) also embodies a less “radical”
transformation. Cranfield writes that “it is not to be implied here that the old man no
longer exists. \textit{Pace} Murray I, p. 219f, the old fallen nature hangs on in the believer.”\textsuperscript{72}
When this is taken into account, “dead to sin” in Cranfield’s idealistic reasoning is less
actually and existentially experienced, but more judicially and forensically proclaimed in
God’s sight. In addition, for Cranfield the “crucifixion of the old self” is not a decisive,
experiential annihilation; consequentially it can be understood that the old self was
\textit{supplemented} by the new self, not radically \textit{supplanted} by it. In general, Cranfield’s
idealistic interpretation therefore seems to differ from what definitive sanctification
means, viz., a \textit{decisive} and \textit{actual} break with sin and its power.

The other possible interpretation for “dead to sin” and “crucifixion of the old
self” is the realistic. In Murray’s writings on definitive sanctification, his interpretation of
“dead to sin” is in fact realistic, i.e., it is wholly \textit{experiential} and \textit{actualized} through
mystical union with Christ; therefore a believer’s former slavery to sin and its realm has
been terminated and the old self \textit{has been} completely annihilated.\textsuperscript{73} In a similar way
biblical scholars also present “dead to sin” (v. 2) and the “old self was crucified” (v. 6) as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Cranfield, \textit{Romans}, 299.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Cranfield, \textit{Romans}, 1:309. Cf. In Murray’s own words: “[I]t is a mistake to think of the
believer as both an old man and new man or as having in him both the old man and the new man, the latter
in view of regeneration and the former because of remaining corruption. That this is not Paul’s concept is
made apparent here by the fact that the ‘old man’ is represented as having been crucified with Christ and
the tense indicates a once-for-all definitive act after the pattern of Christ’s crucifixion. The ‘old man’ can
no more be regarded as in the process of being crucified than Christ in his sphere could be thus regarded.”
\item \textsuperscript{73} Murray, \textit{Romans}, 1:1:211-226; idem, \textit{Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics} (Grand
\end{itemize}
a “decisive and final break in one’s state of being,”\textsuperscript{74} “not [a] legal relationship, but actual power,”\textsuperscript{75} or a “casting out the old [self],” etc.\textsuperscript{76} These commentators are not satisfied to regard “dead to sin” as only a judicial or forensic declaration, nor do they accept the “crucifixion of the old self” in the merely passive sense. The realistic interpretation of “dead to sin” and “crucifixion of the old self” is what definitive sanctification connotes as the believer’s experience in a decisive, actual, and experiential break with sin and the attendant escape from its powerful realm through the union with Christ, in which the old self is “realistically” eradicated and then “radically” replaced by the new self.

The actual and decisive change in the believer’s condition which appears in Romans 6:2 and 6:6 is also expressed in 6:14a as “dominion.” This text proclaims that sin will have no dominion over God’s children, who are dying to sin and who crucified their old self on the cross. Moo points out that this passage “reminds us of just what we have become in Jesus Christ: ‘dead to sin, alive to God.’ There has already taken place in the life of the believer a ‘change of lordship.’”\textsuperscript{77} This change “[provides] the assurance of the continuance of this new state [so] that the believer can go forth boldly and confidently to wage war against sin.”\textsuperscript{78} The phrase “will not rule” (κυριεύσει) is a future tense, but as

\textsuperscript{74} Moo, Romans, 357.

\textsuperscript{75} Schreiner, Romans, 349.

\textsuperscript{76} Fitzmyer, Romans, 433. See also Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 165.

\textsuperscript{77} Moo, Romans, 387.

\textsuperscript{78} Moo, Romans, 387.
Schreiner notes, this “eschatological future has broken into the present era, for the 
mastery of sin has been broken for those who belong to Christ . . . What we have is a 
promise that assures believers that sin cannot rule over them [in the here and now].”79

Thus, Romans 6:14a which is based on the argument of Romans 6:2 ("dead to sin") and 
6:6 ("old self was crucified") supports the notion of definitive sanctification, signifying 
that in the lordship of Christ, sin will have no dominion over believers who have 
definitively died to sin in mystical union with Christ.

Thus it is reasonable to conclude that Romans 6:1-14 (specifically, 6:2, 6:6, and 6:14a) supports the notion of definitive sanctification.

2.3.1.2 Definitive Sanctification in 1 Corinthians 1:2, 6.11

Since Murray also sees a “definitive” dimension as well as regeneration, justification, and 
adoption in sanctification in 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 6:1182 we must examine 
them to see whether they actually support the concept of definitive sanctification.

First, if ἡγιασμένοις “to those who are sanctified” in 1 Corinthians 1:2 is the

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79 Schreiner, Romans, 369.

80 “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to 
be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their 
Lord and ours” (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὐσῇ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, 
σὺν πάσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλομένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ 
ἡμῶν-).

81 “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were 
justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (καὶ ταῦτα τινὲς ἦτε: ἄλλα 
ἀπελούσασθε, ἄλλα ἠγιάσθητε, ἄλλα ἐδικαίωθητε ἐν τῷ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ 
πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν).

perfect passive participle of the verb ἁγιάζω “to sanctify,” and is merely understood as sanctification that has already been completed in the past, it may be difficult to draw the complete sense of definitive sanctification from it, for definitive sanctification includes not only the sense that the action has been completed in the past, but also the ongoing “condition” of sharing and conforming to Christ’s perfect holiness. Therefore if “ἡγιασμένος” depicts the believer’s status as most current exegetical treatments hold, in order to legitimately support definitive sanctification it must also include the “condition” of being sanctified.

But a number of commentators do see the complete sense of definitive sanctification in 1 Corinthians 1:2. Thiselton writes that the phrases “ἡγιασμένος” (to those who are sanctified) and “κλητῆς ἁγίοις” (called to be holy) refer to the believers’ “special status” or their “already given status” derived from their being in Christ. Also, Fee says that 1 Corinthians 1:2 shows how “they [who are in union with Christ] are to behave differently from the wicked, because God in his mercy has already removed the stains of their past sins, has already begun the work of ethical transformation, and has already given them forgiveness and restored right standing with himself.” Schreiner, a staunch advocate for the notion of definitive sanctification in 1 Corinthians 1:2, notes that

83 On this case, see Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 207.


85 Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 76-77. See also Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 126.

86 Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 247.
in referring to believers as the “sanctified in Christ Jesus, [Paul] could scarcely be referring to their notable progress in holiness. . . . Since they are in Christ, they belong to the realm of the holy. They are sanctified definitively or positionally, even though they are not sanctified in terms of personal behavior.” In a similar vein, “most of the places where Paul talks about being ‘holy’ or ‘sanctified,’” Carson observes, “fall into this POSITIONAL or DEFINITIONAL camp. That is certainly the case in 1 Corinthians 1:2 . . . The Corinthians already are sanctified; they have been set apart for God” (capitalization and emphasis in the original). As Peterson points out, ἡγιασμένοις (to those who are sanctified) in 1 Corinthians 1:2 “can hardly refer to their holiness of character or conduct,” but “has to do with the identity and status of those who are ‘in Christ’” (emphasis added). Commentators who see the concept of definitive sanctification in 1 Corinthians 1:2 are convinced that (1) the object of the plural form of the dative participle ἡγιασμένοις (to those who are sanctified) is not the ecclesiological body, but the individual church members who have the personal responsibility to live out their consecrated status in Christ (Thiselton, Fitzmyer, etc), and (2) ἡγιασμένοις is understood as “the result of divine activity (specifically through union with Christ)” or “not achieving holiness, but a received gift” and a “divine call” (Fee, Garland, etc.).

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87 Schreiner, New Testament Theology, 373.
88 Carson, For the Love of God, August 27 entry.
89 Peterson, Possessed by God, 40.
90 Thiselton, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 76-77; Fitzmyer, First Corinthians, 126. On the opposing opinion, see Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 208. Cf. Hays, First Corinthians, 16.
91 Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 32; Garland, 1 Corinthians, 28. Peterson also insists that “the context [of 1 Cor. 1:2] is about belonging to God and being given a holy status. The focus is on
Given all these affirmative interpretations, it can be safely said that ἡγιάσμενοις in 1 Corinthians 1:2 substantially supports the idea of definitive sanctification in terms of the individual’s *already given condition* through divine activity and call.

The second issue is the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:11, specifically in the phrase “you were sanctified [ἡγιάσθητε] . . . in [ἐν] the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” As Peterson points out, “The verb of the indicative aorist passive form “ἡγιάσθητε” (you were sanctified) does not refer to a process of ethical development but highlights the fact that God claimed [the individual Corinthian church members] as his own and made them members of his holy people.”92 Witherington also notes that the past tense of the verb ἡγιάσθητε “indicates that Paul is referring to a definitive event in the past.”93 Thus, the meaning of ἡγιάσθητε is closer to the idea of definitive sanctification than that of progressive sanctification. As to ἐν (“in” the name of the Lord Jesus Christ), Fee observes that the usage in the “instrumental sense” is more reasonable than in the “baptismal sense.”94 That is, not by a baptizing action but only in and through the name and work of Jesus Christ can sanctification be started and finished. The phrase “ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” (in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ) therefore refers “to what God’s saving activity, not on our response.” See Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 44.

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94 Fee notes: “The use of en with ‘baptism’ does not correspond to Paul’s usage elsewhere. Indeed, in the NT en with ‘baptize’ refers to the element into which one has been baptized (cf. 12.13); with ‘baptize’ Paul uses the preposition eis: one is ‘baptized into the name’ (cf. 1:13-15) or ‘into Christ’ (Gal. 3:28).” See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 246-247.
God has done for his people in Christ."95 Just as 1 Corinthians 1:2 does, 1 Corinthians 6:11 also includes both the definitive and Christological dimensions in sanctification.

2.3.2. The Confessional Case for Definitive Sanctification

Is it acceptable to say that “… no Reformed confessional document has a doctrine formally or materially like definitive sanctification” as Fesko claims?96 Although the Reformed and Presbyterian confessions do not explicitly name definitive sanctification, their clear affirmation of the lordship of Christ incorporates the idea. Thus, it is not surprising to find that several Reformed confessions contain the emblem of definitive sanctification or at least an analogous expression of it.

The first example is Q&A 43 of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563, hereafter HC):97

Question: What further benefit do we receive from the sacrifice and death of Christ on the cross?
Answer: That by his power our old man is with him crucified, slain, and buried; that so the evil lusts of the flesh may no more reign in us, but that we may offer ourselves unto him a sacrifice of thanksgiving.98

The language “old man is crucified with Christ” (identity) and “sin no more reigns in us” (lordship) is similar to what definitive sanctification stands for as previously mentioned.

95 Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 247.
96 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 209.
97 On the purpose, authorship, sources, translation issues, and theological orientation of the HC, the following book is helpful and well-arranged. See Lyle D. Bierma et al., An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology: With a Translation of the Smaller and Larger Catechisms of Zacharias Ursinus (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).
The new identity and lordship, according to HC 43, are the gracious “practical” benefits of the sacrifice and death of Christ just as Murray said. Expositors therefore tend to interpret HC 43 in the context of sanctification. For example, Johannes van der Kemp closely connects the expression “being crucified, dead, and buried” of HC 43 to sanctification. Likewise according to Allen Verhey the content of HC 43 deals with “the blessings of membership in Christ” which remain as “practical” interests as well as “moral” inferences. G. H. Kersten concurs with other commentators that HC 43 describes the “fruit of the sacrifice of the Lord that we may already taste here in this life, the fruit of sanctification” (emphasis added). And Norman Jones notes, “Question 43 teaches us . . . he [Christ] died to make us holy, to purify our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. . . . Christians enjoy the benefit of sanctification by the Spirit of Christ!”

In the way it depicts the believer’s definitive “identity” and “lordship” in relation to sin through Christ’s works in the context of salvation, one can say that HC 43 gives a definite picture of definitive sanctification.}


102 Norman L. Jones, Study Helps on the Heidelberg Catechism (Sutton, 1974), 64.

103 Not only HC 43, but also HC 1 and 34 show the dimension of definitive sanctification. Cf. HC 1: “What is thy only comfort in life and in death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.” HC 34: “Why callest thou him our Lord? Because, not with
A second example of definitive sanctification in confessional documents is the section on sanctification in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647, hereafter WCF). WCF 13.1 says that:

They who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.104

WCF 13.1 describes sanctification in both its definitive and progressive aspects. The meaning of “the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed” is identical with the meaning of “lordship” expressed in definitive sanctification. Then the language “[sin] more and more weakened and mortified” and the “[the believer] more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces” evokes an image that we connect with progressive sanctification. Robert Letham agrees that both conceptions of sanctification (i.e., definitive and progressive) coexist in WCF 13.1.105 Several expositors have interpreted the expression “the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed” in the context of regeneration.106 This is a possible interpretation, but there are three more

silver or gold, but with his precious blood, he has redeemed and purchased us, body and soul, from sin and from all the power of the devil, to be his own.”


105 Letham points out that “what happens in sanctification is twofold. First, something takes place at once, decisively: ‘the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed’ (WCF 13.1). The proof texts cited by the Assembly are Romans 6:6 and 6:14. They both refer to what has happened to all believers by union with Christ in his death and resurrection. An irreversible change has taken place. . . Second, there are continuous and lifelong aspects to sanctification.” See Robert Letham, The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context (Phillipsburg: P & R Pub., 2009), 278-279.

106 See, e.g., Chad Van Dixhoorn, Confessing the Faith: A Reader’s Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 177-181; A. A. Hodge, The Confession of
reasonable alternatives in which definitive sanctification may be inferred from WCF 13.1. First, in context the expression “the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed” appears to be the once-for-all, permanent condition of regenerated people who are then “further sanctified.” Seen in this light, definitive sanctification (“the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed”), vivification (regenerated people), and progressive sanctification (“further sanctified”) appear to be independent ideas in WCF 13.1. Second, the expression “the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed” appears prior to the concept of progressive sanctification. This implies that definitive sanctification is understood as an initial stage before advancing to progressive sanctification. Third, WCF 13.1 is fundamentally about sanctification. It is therefore reasonable that definitive sanctification is implied in WCF 13.1 in the expression “the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed” where it conveys the idea of “lordship.”

2.3.3. Francis Turretin’s Case for Definitive Sanctification

As seen before, definitive sanctification speaks to believers’ “status” or “identity” in Christ, i.e., believers are definitively sanctified in union with Christ. While believers actively make an effort to be holy for the rest of their lives (progressive sanctification), they are passively sanctified through the mystical union with Christ (definitive sanctification). Human action or effort is neither needed nor found in definitive

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sanctification.

Swiss-Italian Reformed theologian Francis Turretin also speaks of the passive aspect of sanctification. He states, “it [sanctification] is taken passively, insofar as it is wrought by God in us; then actively, insofar as it ought to be done by us, God performing this work in us and by us” (emphasis in the original). According to Turretin there is an aspect of sanctification that God alone accomplishes; thus his concept of passive sanctification matches the idea of definitive sanctification which is God’s monergistic work.

Turretin notices the biblical expression “those who are sanctified” (τοὺς ἁγιαζομένους, Heb 10:14) when he describes the state of the believer. For Turretin, those who are sanctified are not people who merely change their external moral behavior, but those whose nature itself is renovated. Referring to 1 Thessalonians 5:23 “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely,” Turretin specifies, “it [sanctification] consists in a change and renovation of the nature itself, corrupted by original sin, by which depraved qualities and habits are cast out and good ones infused so that the man desists from evil acts and strives for good.” Turretin’s discussion of the “changed nature” speaks of the believer’s radically altered identity, that he is no longer Satan’s

107 Turretin, Institutio theologiae elencticae, 2:754 (17.1.3); Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 2:689. “Hoc sensu modò passivè sumitur, quatenus fit à Deo in nobis, modò activè quatenus debet fieri à nobis Deo in nobis & per nos hoc opus peragente.”

108 Turretin, Institutio theologiae elencticae, 2:754 (17.1.3); Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 2:689.

109 Turretin, Institutio theologiae elencticae, 2:754 (17.1.4); Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 2:690. “Haec autem non consistit in sola vitae morumque emendatione . . . Sed in Immutatione & renovatione ipsius naturae, peccato originali corruptae, qua pravae qualitates & habitus abolentur, & boni infunduntur, ut homo desistat à malis actionibus & studeat bonis.”
offspring, a corrupted one, but God’s child, sanctified by the renovation of his sinful
nature itself by God’s sovereign work. The concept of sanctification that Turretin
proposes is closer to the idea of definitive sanctification than to progressive
sanctification.

2.4. Theological Disagreement

The notion of definitive sanctification has become widely accepted in conservative
evangelical and Reformed circles since Murray elaborated on it. In theological
discussions that primarily dealt with progressive sanctification, the dimension of
definitive sanctification has enriched our understanding of the doctrine of sanctification.
However, even though for a long time theological consensus has approved of the idea of
definitive sanctification, recently it has come under fire. The criticisms involve two
theological issues: (1) the relationship between forensic justification and definitive
sanctification, and (2) the placement of definitive sanctification in the ordo salutis.

110 See, e.g., Reymond, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, 757; Hoekema,
“Reformed View,” 72-77; Packer, Keep in Step with the Spirit; Peterson, Possessed by God; Ferguson, The
Holy Spirit; Gaffin, “By Faith, Not by Sight,” 77-78; Frame, “Salvation and Theological Pedagogy,” 57-70;
Ridderbos, Paul; Davidson, “Gospel Holiness: Some Dogmatic Reflections,” 192, 200-201, 208. See also
incidental materials to deal briefly with the idea of definitive sanctification: John Piper and David Mathis, eds., Acting the Miracle, 15; Nelson, Bible Doctrines, 104; Williams, Systematic Theology, 2:256; Harris, Our Faith and Fellowship, 24; Vickers, The Cross, 96; Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, 407; Keathly, “The Doctrine of Salvation,” 407.

111 Note that the best way to express the so-called ordo salutis would be “application of
salvation” or “redemptive sequence” rather than the “order” of salvation, inasmuch as the term ordo (order)
significantly connotes a kind of mechanical procedure or sequence that is formulated as a rigid order. On
the idea and arrangement of the ordo, see Louis Berkhof, ST, 415-422; Herman Hoeksema, Reformed
2.4.1. Mixing Forensic Justification with Definitive Sanctification

Fesko is uncomfortable with definitive sanctification, arguing that “it is an unhelpful category because it confuses the forensic [with the] transformative aspect of our redemption.” For Fesko, definitive sanctification is at best a notion that “muddies the waters regarding the inseparable but nevertheless distinct blessings of the *duplex gratia* [justification and sanctification]. The phrase “the decisive and definitive break with the power and service of sin” that Murray uses to support the idea of definitive justification, Fesko says “according to the historic witness of the Reformed tradition [always] comes in justification,” not in definitive sanctification. Fesko adds that if sanctification as defined in Murray’s exposition “contains both forensic [definitive sanctification] and transformative [progressive sanctification] realities,” “[this] confuses justification (Christ’s work for us) with sanctification (Christ’s work in us) and compromises the integrity of both.” According to Fesko, if definitive sanctification indeed “confuses the forensic and transformative categories by taking a statement [that applies to] justification and [moves] it under the doctrine of sanctification,” the notion has an “unsatisfactory nature” in terms of the doctrinal category.

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112 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 197.

113 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 207.


115 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 213.

116 Fesko, “Sanctification and Union with Christ,” 207. Even though Fesko ceaselessly emphasizes a “divisibility” between justification and sanctification as well as a “logical priority” of justification over sanctification, it does not mean that Fesko rejects an inseparability of the *duplex gratia*, namely, justification and sanctification. In Fesko’s own words: “[W]e receive the *duplex gratia* through our union with Christ, the forensic aspect of that union in justification, and the transformative aspect in our sanctification. We receive this inseparable double-blessing, but justification and sanctification are
Fesko’s criticism is worthwhile in that it provides a valuable opportunity to analyze in detail the place of definitive sanctification in comparison to other logical sections of the ordo salutis, specifically in the sphere of justification. However, Fesko’s basic objection must itself be rejected.

Fesko claims that the idea of definitive sanctification inevitably confuses justification with sanctification. He appears to say that an objective change in our status before God is all and only about justification. Even if the notion of definitive sanctification were to include an objective and definitive change in status, Fesko doubts that both definitive sanctification and justification are needed to explain the change; if he is correct, then definitive sanctification is redundant and serves no purpose. However, the heart of his argument does not bear close scrutiny. The fact that our union in Christ definitively changes our status before God cannot belong under the doctrine of justification alone; the believer’s union with Christ has other dimensions. Of course, it would be easier to restrict the concept of justification to our forensic or legal status of guilt or innocence before God. Yet in Christ believers are no longer slaves but redeemed; no longer alienated but reconciled; no longer in bondage but liberated; and particularly no longer corrupt and polluted but holy. In all of these changes there is an objective, declarative, and once-for-all decisive and definitive reality that is actual and active in the life of the believer.


118 Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” 277; idem, “The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,” 287. See also Murray, Romans, 1:222. According to Richard Muller, Calvin at a stage of the ongoing development of the firm distinction between justification and sanctification “held a forensic understanding
encompass all of these.

In particular, if the believer’s definitive changed status before God is limited to justification as Fesko maintains, then the believer’s changed status with respect to holiness before God will be missed. Who believers are before God (definitive status) must include both justification (righteous as opposed to guilty) and sanctification (holy as opposed to polluted) in union with Christ. Thus these ideas are complementary and all-inclusive.

2.4.2. The Placement of Definitive Sanctification in the *Ordo Salutis*

Murray does not offer a clear view of where definitive sanctification is situated in the *ordo salutis*. This leaves us with two theological questions.\(^ {119} \) The first, posed by Fesko himself, is whether forensic justification logically comes prior to sanctification. The second, asked by Michael Horton, is whether definitive sanctification is placed at a

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\(^ {119} \) Although Murray does not explicitly mention the term “definitive sanctification” in *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (1955), which was written before “Definitive Sanctification” (1967), he elaborates the similar notion to definitive sanctification in the section of “presuppositions of sanctification” in chapter VII. See Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*, 177-179. In “Definitive Sanctification” and “The Agency of Definitive Sanctification,” Murray does not try to assign the placement of definitive sanctification in the *ordo salutis*.
distinct and independent point in the *ordo salutis*.\(^{120}\)

2.4.2.1. Logical Priority\(^{121}\) of Justification over Sanctification

Fesko’s criticism of definitive sanctification is based on his conviction that forensic justification is the predecessor to sanctification on the basis of union with Christ.\(^{122}\) Fesko’s argument brought him into a theological debate with Richard Gaffin.\(^{123}\) He insists that Gaffin has mistakenly mixed the *duplex gratia* together by not properly recognizing the priority of forensic justification before sanctification.\(^{124}\) Fesko is firm about the need to maintain this sequence and avoid treating forensic justification and sanctification as an amalgam. Fesko’s securing the order of justification before sanctification is theologically correct and proper, for indeed the logical priority of

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\(^{120}\) Horton accepts the idea of definitive sanctification *per se* since he uses that idea to build his whole layout of sanctification. See Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 248. Yet, at least with regard to the placement of definitive sanctification in the *ordo salutis*, he seems to have a question. See Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 650n6.

\(^{121}\) Note that here any “temporal order” is not included in the *ordo salutis*. The *ordo* always referred to a “soteriological-logical sequence.” However, it also needs to be noted that as Muller rightly pointed out, the entire sequence of the *ordo salutis* “rests on the free divine willing, cannot as a whole ultimately be a logical sequence” (emphasis added). See Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 241.


\(^{124}\) Fesko, “A Tale of Two Calvins,” 103-104.
forensic justification over progressive sanctification has never been in dispute. Murray endorses it elsewhere, and no one questions this truth.

However, the logical placement of justification prior to all aspects of sanctification in the *ordo salutis* is not so straightforward. First, according to Calvin justification and sanctification are given to the faithful “simultaneously” (*simul*) as well as distinctively, and second, the logical sequence has mainly been argued using progressive sanctification, not definitive sanctification.

This second point is directly connected to the present study. Fesko does not allow

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128 Historically speaking, sanctification and regeneration, for John Calvin, are almost synonymously understood (see Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.9. See also discussion in: Berkhof, *ST*, 466-467; Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 4n7) and therefore regeneration (read sanctification) is prior to justification in the *ordo salutis*, as recognized in Calvin’s placement of sanctification before justification in his *Institutes* (but it needs to be understood in a pedagogical sense). Note that the *Institutes*, according to Muller, does not typically follow the “ordering patterns related to causal, logical, or temporal issues often raised in the commentaries; its structuring is largely *pedagogical*, whether following a catechetical model, or a model grounded in the Epistle to the Romans, or reflecting aspects of Melanchthon’s *loci communes*” (emphasis added). See Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 212.

129 In Calvin’s own words: “[T]he Lord freely justifies his own in order that he may at the same time restore them to true righteousness by sanctification of his Spirit.” See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.19. See also *Institutes*, 3.16.1: “Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we grasp Christ’s righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. . . . Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.” On this, Hunsinger’s article is helpful: George Hunsinger, “A Tale of Two Simultaneities: Justification and Sanctification in Calvin and Barth,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 18, no. 3 (January 2002): 316-338. See also Jonathan H. Rainbow, “Double Grace: John Calvin’s View of the Relationship of Justification and Sanctification,” *Ex Auditu* 5 (January 1989): 99-105.

for definitive sanctification when he highlights the importance of the logical priority of justification over sanctification; this is a consistent omission for him since he dismisses entirely the concept of definitive sanctification.\textsuperscript{131} Even though Murray also endorses securing the logical priority of forensic justification over progressive sanctification in the \textit{ordo salutis},\textsuperscript{132} he does not explicitly mention anywhere the order of forensic justification and definitive sanctification. Rather, he concentrates on affirming that both forensic justification and definitive sanctification are a result of or directly stem from union with Christ’s death and resurrection.\textsuperscript{133} In his discussion of definitive sanctification Murray does not directly address the logical order of justification and definitive sanctification but chooses instead to examine the \textit{ordo salutis} through the lens of union with Christ. For Murray it is more important to see the soteriological \textit{duplex gratia} in the light of union with Christ\textsuperscript{134} rather than to make an exhaustive (and exhausting) effort to find the priority between justification and definitive sanctification. But Murray does consider the logical soteriological sequence, inasmuch as he endorses the logical priority of forensic justification ahead of progressive sanctification. In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131} Gaffin, “A Response to John Fesko’s Review,” 111.
\item \textsuperscript{132} See, esp., Murray, \textit{Redemption, Accomplished and Applied}, 147-164. On this, therefore, the author of the present study agrees with Fesko’s emphasis that forensic justification is prior to progressive sanctification.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Murray, “The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,” 286-287.
\item \textsuperscript{134} In Calvin’s own words: “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, being sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.” See Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.11.1. On Calvin’s doctrine of the \textit{duplex gratia}, see Rainbow, “Double Grace,” 99-105; Cornelis P. Venema, \textit{Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The “Twofold Grace of God” and the Interpretation of Calvin’s Theology} (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Dennis E. Tamburello, \textit{Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 85-86; Gaffin, “Calvin’s Soteriology: The Structure of the Application of Redemption in Book Three of the Institutes,” 71-72.
\end{itemize}
Murray’s words: “Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ.” Since it is appropriate to place the *duplex gratia* under the umbrella of union with Christ, attempting to place forensic justification ahead of both definitive *and* progressive sanctification rather than only the progressive aspect is illogical. Definitive sanctification should be understood as the “condition,” or state, or mode of existence of sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness through mystical union with Christ, not as part of a particular order or sequence.

In sum, the notion of definitive sanctification can best be understood in the all-encompassing concept of union with Christ rather than in the logical soteriological steps, for definitive sanctification is simply the “condition” or “state” of conforming to Christ’s perfect holiness in union with Christ.

2.4.2.2. The *Ordo Salutis* and Definitive Sanctification

Before addressing the issue of where definitive sanctification might be situated in the

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136 Note that the term “condition” may be interchangeably used with the term “state.” Yet, in order to explain the idea of definitive sanctification, “condition” is more suitable than “state” because as Berkhof distinguishes, “A state is one’s position or status in life, and particularly the forensic relationship in which one stands to the law, while a condition is the mode of one’s existence, especially as determined by the circumstances of life.” Since definitive sanctification is a believer’s “mode of existence” of being definitively sanctified as a result of conformity to Christ’s perfect holiness in and through the mystical union with Christ, the term “condition” well speaks of the nature of definitive sanctification. See Berkhof, *ST*, 331.

ordo salutis, a relationship between the classic *ordo* and definitive sanctification must first be established. According to Murray, the *ordo* is about the *application* of the redemption accomplished in Christ.\(^{138}\) The elements of the classic *ordo* which Murray affirms\(^{139}\) include calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification, and perseverance of the saints.\(^{140}\) A distinction can be drawn between calling and regeneration on one hand and the conversion, justification, sanctification, and perseverance of the saints on the other. The first group of terms is monergistic, i.e., all God-acting—only God ordains and actually accomplishes them. The second group of terms has both God- and human-acting components: the human acts in faith, obedience, perseverance, courage, etc. With this second grouping there is a risk that human efforts might be emphasized more than God’s initiative.

In the classic *ordo*, definitive sanctification identifies the divine initiative aspect of sanctification, while progressive sanctification identifies the human response in obedience. Thus definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification are distinct and necessary aspects of the same reality (sanctification) in the *ordo*. Emphasizing definitive sanctification does not change the classic *ordo*; it only places an appropriately equal emphasis on both sovereign initiative and human response.


\(^{140}\) See Berkhof, *ST*, pt. 4.
2.4.2.3. Does Definitive Sanctification Represent a Distinct and Independent Point within the *Ordo Salutis*?

While recognizing the theological verity and helpfulness of Murray’s notion of definitive sanctification, Horton separates himself by arguing that “[unlike] Murray, however, I would treat definitive and progressive sanctification as two aspects of the same reality rather than two distinct points in the *ordo salutis*.”¹⁴¹ Fesko also points out that Murray’s idea of definitive sanctification seems to support an assumption that he has something else in mind other than the established *ordo salutis*.¹⁴² Murray gives the impression that definitive sanctification is placed in the *ordo salutis* distinctively and independently in the same way as are other logical steps in the sequence. This may arise from those parts of Murray’s argument that seem contradictory.

Murray says:

> We properly think of calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption as acts of God effected [once-for-all], and not requiring or admitting of repetition. It is of their nature to be definitive. But a considerable part of New Testament teaching places sanctification in this category. When Paul, for example, addresses the believers at Corinth as the church of God ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints’ (I Cor. 1:2), and later in the same Epistle reminds them that they were ‘washed, sanctified, and justified’ (I Cor. 6:11), it is apparent that he co-ordinated their sanctification with effectual calling, with their identity as saints, with regeneration, and with justification [emphasis added].¹⁴³

But he also says:

> While regeneration is an all-important factor in definitive sanctification, it would not be proper to subsume the latter under the topic ‘regeneration.’

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The reason is that what is most characteristic in definitive sanctification, namely, death to sin by union with Christ in his death and newness of life by union with him in his resurrection, cannot properly be referred to as regeneration by the Spirit. There is multiformity to that which occurs at the inception of the Christian life, and each facet must be accorded its own particularity. Calling, for example, as the action of the Father, must not be defined in terms of what is specifically the action of the Holy Spirit, namely, regeneration. Definitive sanctification, likewise, must be allowed its own individuality. We impoverish our conception of definitive grace when we fail to appreciate the distinctiveness of each aspect, or indulge in over-simplification.144

The former quotation is about simultaneity (i.e., the absence of logical sequence) or better, the *inseparability* of definitive sanctification from the rest of the soteriological order; the latter quotation is about the *independence* of definitive sanctification from other moments in the *ordo*. In other words, definitive sanctification in Murray’s scheme *cooperates* and *collaborates* with calling, regeneration, and justification at the inception of Christian life, but is at the same time *distinct* and *different* from them and therefore cannot be amalgamated with the rest of the soteriological order. In simultaneously viewing these two different pictures of definitive sanctification (i.e., that they are both inseparable and distinct), Murray does not describe a uniquely independent point for definitive sanctification in the established *ordo salutis*. Still, Murray offers two considerations.

First, in the classic *ordo*, definitive sanctification is understood to be particularly within the sphere of sanctification. For Murray, definitive sanctification is only *one* of the distinct aspects of sanctification. Horton contends that Murray does not treat definitive and progressive sanctification as two aspects of the same reality, but as two distinct

points in the *ordo salutis*. But his view can be discounted since Murray actually treats sanctification as having *three* aspects of the same reality, i.e., definitive, progressive, and eschatological. Definitive sanctification is the initial and dispositional change that is the decisive and irreversible break with sin and its defilement and power, and thus signals the once-for-all transformation of the believer’s identity and lordship with regard to the realm of sin. Progressive or transformative sanctification, which follows definitive sanctification, is the lifelong sanctifying process that embraces both mortification of sin and vivification of new life in a continuing sense. Contrast this with the eschatological perspective—“already, but also not yet”—which reveals that even though believers were *already* sanctified in the definitive sense and are still *being* sanctified in the progressive sense, the *final fulfillment* of sanctification does not come until the eschaton. In “The Goal of Sanctification” Murray elaborates on the eschatological aspect of sanctification, stating that in the day of the Lord believers “will [finally] be able to contain the full manifestation of the glory of God, and it is the full manifestation of the glory of God that will itself bring with it the glorification of the believer. These are correlative the one with the other.”

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146 The threefold aspect of the same reality can be readily recognized through the subtitles of Murray’s collected writings concerning sanctification: Definitive sanctification (277-284), progressive sanctification (294-304), and the goal of sanctification (which is related with eschatological sanctification) (313-317). See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Professor of Systematic Theology*, ed. Iain H. Murray (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 2:277-317. Cf. Wayne Grudem faithfully follows a threefold structure of sanctification when he deals with the subject of sanctification. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 747-748.


sanctification plays its specific role in describing the believer’s initial condition followed by the progressive and then the final fulfillment of sanctification.

Second, the theme of “union with Christ” is Murray’s central solution to obviate the appearance of contradiction. He shows that definitive sanctification is distinct from effectual calling, regeneration, and justification, albeit in a closely correlated soteriological order, but they all ultimately converge in the believer’s union with Christ. Murray notes:

> Obviously it [union with Christ] is an important aspect of the application of redemption and, if we did not take account of it, not only would our presentation of the application of redemption be defective but our view of the Christian life would be gravely distorted. Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. . . . [U]nion with Christ is in itself a very broad and embracive subject. It is not simply a step in the application of redemption; when viewed, according to the teaching of Scripture, in its broader aspects it underlies every step of the application of redemption. Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.¹⁴⁹

Since every step in the soteriological order stems from the same root, namely, union with Christ, retaining the particularity and uniqueness of each step does not disorder the ordo salutis, but rather shows that its salvific meaning is rich and multifaceted. Murray emphasizes definitive sanctification’s own particularity, not to make a new place for it in the classic ordo salutis as some assume, but to ensure that definitive sanctification is not confused or mixed with other redemptive steps so that its own place does not collapse and disappear. For Murray, definitive sanctification stands as the initial stage in the threefold sanctification in the ordo and is grounded in union with Christ just as the other

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¹⁴⁹ Murray, Redemption, Accomplished and Applied, 201.
salvific steps are. Union with Christ therefore functions not only as the lifeline for each unique soteriological step, but also synchronizes each particular step of the *ordo salutis* into one consistent salvific viewpoint.

In sum, definitive sanctification is understood to be the first of three aspects of the one reality of sanctification in the classic *ordo*. Definitive sanctification points to the divine initiative of sanctification; human response acts in the sphere of progressive sanctification. The uniqueness of definitive sanctification in the *ordo salutis* must be seen in the light of union with Christ.

### 2.4.3. Lessons from Theological Debates

Murray’s conception of definitive sanctification has theological benefit in that it helps to defend against the error of seeing sanctification as based on human merit. It also helps to focus our attention on the role of union with Christ in sanctification as presented in Scripture. And it highlights an otherwise obscured aspect of sanctification, i.e., its definitiveness and decisiveness. This is why the concept has been actively employed so successfully in the discussion of sanctification. Yet it is also true that the idea of definitive sanctification has not been sufficiently clarified, which is why questions have arisen concerning where it is positioned in the *ordo salutis*, or whether it belongs there at all.

It is hard to deny that Murray has opened himself up to misunderstandings since he does not directly address the issues which are now being criticized. Yet it is important to keep in mind Murray’s chief concern was not to defend the existence or position of
definitive sanctification in the *ordo salutis*; rather his main interest was to provide scriptural evidence pointing to the “definitive” aspect of sanctification, and to address the way that in the soteriology of his day progressive sanctification overemphasized the role that human activity plays in sanctification.

However, even with the limited evidence presented thus far we have successfully defended the concept of definitive sanctification against the objections, only having shown that it merely speaks to the “condition” or “state” of being sanctified as a result of having been conformed to Christ’s perfect holiness in and through mystical union with Christ. The concept of definitive sanctification is not intended nor does it in fact upset the classic *ordo salutis*; attempts to deflect the discussion in this direction ignore the main point.

2.4.4. Definitive Sanctification and Faith

In the past the Reformation principle of *sola fide* has been recognized as residing in the sphere of justification; Christians are in general more accustomed to hearing the expression “justification by faith.”[^150] Yet this study maintains that Christians are also

[^150]: When Ferguson talks about the “means of sanctification,” he does not mention “faith,” but provides four other major means, namely, the Word, the providence, the fellowship of the church, and the sacraments. See Sinclair B. Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald Alexander (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 67-74. Meantime, Ferguson mentions the role of faith in the realm of sanctification in the context of emphasizing the foundational importance of union with Christ: “[T]his union with Christ does not take place over our heads, as it were. It engages our whole being. Consequently, a second element in it is that of faith. In the New Testament’s language, we believe *into* Christ (*pisteuein eis*), that is, into union with him. Faith involves trusting in and resting on the resources of Christ as though they were our own.” See Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” 51.
sanctified by faith. As Anthony Hoekema explains it, faith is a means of sanctification because it is by faith that “we continue to grasp our union with Christ, which is the heart of sanctification”; it is also by faith that “we accept the fact that in Christ sin no longer has the mastery over us”; and finally it is by faith that “we grasp the power of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to overcome sin and live for God.”

But even having heard it expressed so succinctly does not necessarily make it easier to hold onto the idea that we are sanctified by faith. To better pin it down, we must first answer the question of whether justification by faith and sanctification by faith are distinct from one other. Then we must determine whether the term definitive sanctification can be used to describe any part of sanctification by faith. Finally, with these questions settled it must be determined whether or not the role of faith in definitive sanctification is different from that of progressive sanctification. These questions are closely related to the theology of the role of faith in justification and sanctification generally or in definitive and progressive sanctification specifically.

Berkouwer consistently and persuasively elaborates the necessity and performance of faith in the sphere of sanctification. See, esp., chapter 2 (“Sola Fide” and Sanctification) of G. C. Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 17-44. Henry Blocher also argues that “sancification is sola fide because it happens ‘in Christ,’ through our clinging to him and our being conformed to him by that Spirit-enacted union with him, including concentration (focusing on our new identity in Christ) and ‘de-centration’ (moving away from an egocentric perspective to one concerned with the other).” See Blocher, “Sanctification by Faith?,” 64.

Hoekema, Saved by Grace, 196. Bavinck also states: Faith “is by no means in justification only, but quite as much in sanctification, that by faith exclusively we are saved. For we on our part can accept Christ and His benefits and make them our own only through faith.” See Herman Bavinck, Our Reasonable Faith, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1956), 480. Hereafter Our Reasonable Faith will be cited as ORF. Subsequent quotations will be taken mostly from Zylstra’s translation, but if necessary, the translation will be modified in consultation with the original Dutch text. When quoted from the Dutch text, the original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages.

In answer to the first question, faith performs as a passive instrument and has a receptive function in the realm of justification. The passive role and receptive nature of faith in justification is well defined in the WCF and LC (Westminster Larger Catechism). LC 73 answers the question “How does faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?” thusly:

Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receives and applies Christ and His righteousness [emphasis added].\(^{154}\)

WCF 11.1.2 also defines the relationship between justification and faith:

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love [emphasis added].\(^{155}\)

In both the WCF and LC, while justifying faith is a receptive act it is solely a gift from God. Faith is merely the receptive instrument by which humans receive, trust, and rest in Christ’s righteousness so as to be righteous in the sight of God.\(^{156}\)

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\(^{156}\) Berkhof explains well regarding the nature of faith in the realm of justification: “Scripture never says that we are justified dia ten pistin, on account of faith. This means that faith is never represented as the ground of our justification. If this were the case, faith would have to be regarded as a meritorious work of man... [F]aith is so thoroughly receptive in the appropriation of the merits of Christ, that it can be put figuratively for the merits of Christ which it receives. ‘Faith’ then is equivalent to the contents of
As to the second question, justifying faith and sanctifying faith are different and distinct. If justifying faith is understood to be passive and receptive described above, then sanctifying faith is understood as active and operative. In J. C. Ryle’s words, “Justifying faith is a grace that ‘worketh not,’ but simply trusts, rests, and leans on Christ (Rom. iv. 5). Sanctifying faith is a grace of which the very life is action: it ‘worketh by love,’ and like a mainspring, moves the whole inward man (Gal. v. 6).”

It is true that when the expression “sanctification by faith” is used it normally refers to the process or means of “progressive” sanctification. G. C. Berkouwer notes:

The immediate consequence of the “sola-fide” doctrine was exactly this indissoluble bond between faith and sanctification. And we speak of faith, not as a point of departure for a fresh emission of power, or as a human function or potency producing other effects, but of faith as true orientation toward the grace of God and as the life which flourishes on this divine grace, on the forgiveness of sins. . . . The Sola-fide is at the heart of justification but no less at that of sanctification. . . . Faith is not inactive, cannot be inactive, but operates in our common daily life.

In contrast to the passive and receptive role of faith in the sphere of justification, faith in the sphere of progressive sanctification is active and operative. However, this effective function of faith should not be regarded as a manifestation of human potancy or ability. Rather, just as with passive/receptive faith it is solely God’s gracious gift. Even though justifying faith and sanctifying faith are functionally distinct and different, nevertheless they essentially aim in the same soteriological direction and ultimately converge in faith, that is, to the merits of the righteousness of Christ.” See Berkhof, ST, 520-521.


158 Ryle, Holiness, viii-ix.

159 Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification, 28, 33, 42.
“saving faith.” WCF 14.2 describes it as follows:

By this [saving] faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace [emphasis added].

Saving faith encompasses not only justifying faith but also sanctifying faith. A passive/receptive faith of justification and an active/operative faith of progressive sanctification work together as saving faith in order to taste the ultimate soteriological fruit of redemption and a redemptive life. As Hoekema puts it, faith “is not only a receptive organ but also an operative power. True faith by its very nature produces spiritual fruit.”

Third, although the relationship between faith and justification has been actively discussed, the question of the relationship between faith and definitive sanctification has scarcely been touched. Even when Berkouwer enunciates an embryonic concept of definitive sanctification in his exposition, “The Genesis of Regeneration,” he does not investigate how faith functions in the realm of definitive sanctification.

Murray is also

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161 Hoekema, Saved by Grace, 196. Bavinck also states that “faith was two things at once: a receptive organ and an active force; a hand that accepts the gift offered but also works outwardly in the service of the will; a bond to invisible things and a victory over the visible world; at once religious and ethical.” See Bavinck, RD, 4:243. See also Herman Bavinck, Gereformeerde dogmatiek, 4th ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1928), 4:227 ($52.479). Hereafter the Dutch edition will be cited as GD. Subsequent quotations will be taken mostly from Vriend’s translation, but if necessary, the translation will be modified in consultation with the original Dutch text. When quoted from the Dutch text, original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages.

162 Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification, 71-100.

163 For the relationship between faith and progressive sanctification, see, esp., Berkouwer, Faith
silent on it. The silence is broken by Calvin Beisner who says that Christians “do not believe in order to be reborn – or to be definitively sanctified. Instead, faith is a consequence of rebirth, which is one aspect of definitive sanctification”\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^4\) (emphasis in the original). Beisner adds:

> In justification, faith is a passive instrument that receives Christ’s righteousness as the ground of God’s declaration that we are righteous in His sight. In definitive sanctification, faith is the effect of God’s regenerating work and is one of the changes wrought in us to separate us not only from the unholy world but also from our own unholy past. In progressive sanctification, faith is an active cause that produces our growth in holiness of character and conduct (emphasis in the original).\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^5\)

For Beisner, definitive sanctification defines faith as a result and outcome of regeneration. This conclusion appears to be based on the following suppositions: (1) definitive sanctification and regeneration are conceptually identical;\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^6\) therefore (2) definitive sanctification (regeneration) must logically precede justification;\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^7\) and (3) the faith of definitive sanctification (regeneration) becomes the instrument for justification.\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^8\)

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\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^6\) “Definitive sanctification involves God’s truly transforming the unregenerate sinner—slave of sin, son of disobedience, natural child of wrath—into a regenerate saint set free from sin and made a slave of righteousness. . . . The one definitively sanctified has been reborn, that is, regenerated, transformed from unbeliever to believer.” See Beisner, “The Roles of Faith,” 6-7.

\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^7\) “Our good works—which are not mere outward conduct but also inward character—are the stuff of our sanctification, but they are the proof of our justification.” See Beisner, “The Roles of Faith,” 8-9.

\(^1\)\(^6\)\(^8\) Snoeberger also endorses the third point in the following manner: “[I]t is possible to hold to definitive sanctification as prior to justification without compromising the orthodox doctrine of justification. That is, one may hold that the disposition of faith that marks the definitively sanctified new man serves immediately as the instrument for justification without succumbing to the heterodox idea that faith and/or faithful deeds in any sense form the ‘way,’ the ‘ground,’ or the ‘condign basis’ for justification.” See Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” 193.
Beisner reasons that faith in the dimension of definitive sanctification is acquired as an outcome of regeneration which occurs solely by God’s sovereign grace. This is what the “divine monergism” of regeneration stands for. J. I. Packer describes it thusly:

Spiritual vivification is a free, and to man mysterious, exercise of divine power (John 3:8), not explicable in terms of the combination or cultivation of existing human resources (John 3:6), not caused or induced by any human efforts (John 1:12-13) or merits (Titus 3:3-7), and not, therefore, to be equated with, or attributed to, any of the experiences, decisions, and acts to which it gives rise and by which it may be known to have taken place.  

The nature of faith in the realm of definitive sanctification (or regeneration in Beisner’s postulate) is totally free of human effort and merit. Although Murray does not equate definitive sanctification with regeneration, and also does not explicitly mention it regarding the nature of faith in the sphere of definitive sanctification, he would at least agree that definitive sanctification and its effects are not obtained by human merited faith, but by a monergistic gracious act—in Murray’s crucial point, through “union with Christ.” In other words, humans do not and cannot believe in order to experience the once-for-all definitive and irreversible break with the power and service of sin. Instead, it is only the mystical union with Christ’s death and resurrection that results in that decisive break; they are then also given the faith in who they are (identity) and by whom they are ruled (lordship).

Faith in justification, as observed above, is passive/receptive and faith in progressive sanctification is active/operative. Both faiths are performed by believers

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acting not *with* God synergistically\(^\text{171}\) but as subordinates, for faith either in justification or progressive sanctification springs from God’s grace and is thus solely God’s gift.\(^\text{172}\) Having accepted this, what is the exact role of faith in bringing about definitive sanctification? Beisner’s answer is succinct: “[P]recisely *nothing*. . . . Far from saying that we are definitively sanctified by faith, we must say rather that we are made believers by our definitive sanctification.”\(^\text{173}\) In other words, the human’s act of faith does not serve as the primary or first cause of definitive sanctification *per se* because it relies solely on God’s work, but the human’s faith is certainly required in the realm of progressive sanctification in order to “continue to grasp our union with Christ, which is the heart of sanctification.”\(^\text{174}\)

2.5. The Four Core Characteristics of Definitive Sanctification

Now that definitive sanctification has been clearly defined, it can be explained using four characteristics that it has in common with active justification.

First is the quality of “inseparability.” Definitive sanctification does not replace or supersede progressive sanctification because they are both rooted in who Christians are

\(^{171}\) The term “synergistic way” here refers to the Arminian view that as Muller defines, “not only supposes the cooperation of the will with Word and Spirit, but the ability of the will to apply or attach itself to grace. In the Arminian view, the will is the effective ground of salvation. This perspective is not only synergistic but also fully semi-Pelagian.” See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 294 (s.v. *synergismus*). Hereafter, cited as *Dictionary*.

\(^{172}\) Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*, 133-140.


\(^{174}\) Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 196.
(identity) and by who rules them (lordship) through union with Christ. Definitive and progressive sanctification are therefore indivisible and inseparable. The former is the driving force of the latter; the latter is the spiritual fruit of the former. Inseparability means that definitive sanctification and moral progression do not contradict but complement one another, and human works while not meritorious, are still included in the sphere of sanctification.

The second characteristic of definitive sanctification is “objectivity and decisiveness.” Sanctification includes not only a continuing aspect, but also a once-for-all decisive aspect; in both aspects it is God-driven (objective) and in the definitive aspect it is decisive. The decisive characteristic is expressed in relation to sin where definitive sanctification leads to a once-for-all irreversible break with the realm in which sin reigns unto death. Yet this decisive characteristic does not mean the Wesleyan “sinless” state, but rather it denotes an immutable change of ownership where the believer’s status is definitively changed from a child of wrath into one of grace and righteousness.

The third characteristic is “Christ-centeredness.” The alpha and omega of definitive sanctification is the mystical union with Christ; it helps define how through union with Him sinners die to sin and are raised to new life through His death and resurrection, and how Christians share His perfectly holy nature. Thus definitive sanctification is a decisive condition or state, or mode of existence of holiness, not a particular order or a sequence in the established ordo.

The fourth characteristic of definitive sanctification is “God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation.” God’s absolute rule over salvation is fully represented in definitive sanctification, inasmuch as the concept reveals that sanctification, which had
been generally understood as merely the ongoing, lifelong progression toward holiness by
the human agent, is ultimately God-driven. This does not mean that human agency is
totally unnecessary and unrewarded in the realm of sanctification. The Holy Spirit is the
primary agent when sanctification begins; as it continues the human being joins Him as
the secondary agent in progressive sanctification. The answer to who is the primary agent
is always God, not the human.

2.6. Summary
This chapter dealt with definitive sanctification by analyzing the work of its chief
representative John Murray. It answers key objections to his view by presenting biblical,
confessional, and theological evidence.

The two main themes of definitive sanctification are *identity* and *lordship*.
Definitive sanctification speaks of the believer’s decisively changed status, i.e., who
believers ultimately are when they are united with Christ. Definitive sanctification also
speaks of the believer’s decisively changed ownership, i.e., who believers ultimately
belong to once sin no longer has dominion over them. This idea is supported by Romans
6:2 (“dead to sin”), 6:6 (“old self was crucified”), and 6:14a (“sin will have no dominion
over you”). In particular, the stative and perfective tense of 1 Corinthians 1:2
(ἡγιασμένοις—“to those who are sanctified”) and 1 Corinthians 6:11 (ἡγιασθε—“you
were sanctified”) convey the exact meaning of definitive sanctification.

This chapter also dealt with the confessional and theological evidence for
definitive sanctification. Here again the two main themes of definitive sanctification
(identity and lordship) can be found in the statements of HC 43 and WCF 13.1. Francis Turretin’s concept of passive sanctification, which speaks of God’s monergistic work in the sphere of sanctification, also approximates the meaning of definitive sanctification.

The chapter then dealt with theological objections to definitive sanctification. These disagreements involve whether the concepts of forensic justification and definitive sanctification are mixed or confused (Fesko), and whether definitive sanctification is distinctly positioned in the ordo salutis (Horton). The former concern is voided when we make the distinction between our definitive change in status from “guilty before God” to “righteous before God” (forensic justification), and our definitive change in status from “corrupted/polluted before God” to “holy before God” (definitive sanctification) in and through union with Christ. Both changes are definitive and decisive, but they are still conceptually distinct. Furthermore, the concern regarding the placement of definitive sanctification in the ordo salutis is put to rest when we see that definitive sanctification does not occupy an independent place in the ordo but is rather the “condition” of sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness, and as such it is one of the two aspects of the same reality, i.e., “sanctification,” in the classic ordo. Definitive sanctification describes the divine initiative under God the Father’s sovereignty, and progressive sanctification describes human responsibility under God the Holy Spirit’s sovereignty, both rooted in the believer’s union with Christ. Taken together with progressive sanctification, definitive sanctification affirms that sanctification is never human-driven but entirely God-driven.
CHAPTER 3
ACTIVE JUSTIFICATION

In the previous chapter we explored the two inseparable and indivisible aspects of sanctification, *definitive* and *progressive*. Justification also has two aspects, *active* and *passive* which are also inseparable and indivisible. In the same way that definitive sanctification has often been overlooked or dismissed in theology, active justification is rarely mentioned and sometimes even rejected outright.¹ Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) is one theologian who offers a clear affirmation of active (or objective) justification:

This is justification in the most fundamental sense of the word. It is basic to what is called subjective justification, and consists in a declaration which God makes respecting the sinner, and this declaration is made in the tribunal of God. This declaration is not a declaration in which God simply acquits the sinner, without taking any account of the claims of justice, but is rather a divine declaration that, in the case of the sinner under consideration, the demands of the law are met. The sinner is declared righteous in view of the fact that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. In this transaction God appears, not as an absolute Sovereign who simply sets the law aside, but as a righteous Judge, who acknowledges the infinite merits of Christ as a sufficient basis for justification, and as a gracious Father, who freely forgives and accepts the sinner. This active justification logically precedes faith and passive justification. We *believe* the forgiveness of sins [emphasis in the original].²

Berkhof also comments on the objectivity of the divine tribunal’s decision to impute Christ’s righteousness to the sinner as the necessary precursor to the aptly named passive

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² Berkhof, *ST*, 517.
justification which “takes place in the heart or conscience of the sinner.”

This chapter will elucidate and elaborate on the necessity of including active justification in any sound soteriology. We will examine the relevant terms and ideas used by several theologians in the Reformed tradition (Maccovius, Turretin, and à Brakel), then explore the biblical support for the concept, and expose and explain the misunderstandings, misuse, and neglect of the idea that are found in the errors of antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism. Finally, we will show that when properly understood and presented, definitive sanctification and active justification serve to clarify the doctrine of sanctification, thus avoiding theological confusion and providing practical benefit to the believer.

3.1. Clarification of Terms

In distinguishing (but not separating) active from passive justification, Berkhof says that “when the Bible speaks of justification, it usually refers to what is known as passive justification.” Since passive justification has been the primary focus of most theologians, it is important to make clear the distinction between it and active justification.

First, the distinction is a matter of perspective. The active perspective is God’s

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3 Berkhof, _ST_, 517. Berkhof’s main point is that “[a] purely objective justification that is not brought home to the sinner would not answer the purpose. The granting of a pardon would mean nothing to a prisoner, unless the glad tidings were communicated to him and the doors of the prison were opened.” Furthermore, “It should be borne in mind, however, that the two cannot be separated. The one is based on the other. The distinction is simply made to facilitate the proper understanding of the act of justification. Logically, passive justification follows faith; we are justified by faith.”

4 Berkhof, _ST_, 517.
and the passive perspective is the human. Simple Latin grammar reveals them; according to Johannes Maccovius (or Maccowski, 1588-1644), nouns ending in \(-io\) in Latin, such as \textit{justificatio}, usually have both an active and a passive sense.\(^5\) That is, God justifies (active voice); human beings are justified (passive voice). Similarly, Francis Turretin (1623-1687) states that “since justification can be viewed either actively (on the part of God who justifies) or passively (on the part of man who is justified), a twofold understanding of it can also be adopted: either with respect to the benefit itself conferred upon us by God and of the righteousness imputed to us, or with respect to its reception and application made by faith.”\(^6\) Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) makes the same point:

God must be viewed as the Justifier and man as the one being justified. Justification is therefore the pronouncement of a sentence, not only concerning man, but also addressed to man. One can thus view the act of justification from God’s perspective, that is, what He performs in this act, or from man’s perspective, noting the manner whereby man receives this.

When viewing this act from God’s perspective it is referred to as \textit{justification activa}, active justification. When viewed from man’s perspective it is referred to as \textit{justification passiva}, passive justification.\(^7\)


\(^6\) Turretin, \textit{Institutio theologiae elencticae}, 2:731 (16.7.1); \textit{Institutes of Elenctic Theology}, 2:669. “Cum Justificatio possit spectari, vel active a parte Dei qui justificat, vel passive, a parte hominis qui justificatur. Duplex etiam eius tractatio institutí potest, Vel respectu ipsius beneficii a Deo nobis indulti, & Justitiae nobis imputatae, Vel respectu receptionis & applicationis eius, quae fit per fidem . . .”

\(^7\) Wilhelmus à Brakel, \textit{De redelijke godsdienst} (Leiden, 1893). XXXIV.LIII.1; \textit{The Christian’s Reasonable Service}, 2:376. “In de rechtvaardigmaking komt God voor als rechtvaardigende, en de mens, als gerechtvaardigd wordende; zodat rechtvaardigmaking is een uitspraak van sententie, niet alleen over de
Thus three significant theologians in the Reformed tradition agree that the distinction between active and passive justification can be seen as a matter of perspective, one divine and the other human, depending on who is perceived to be either actively doing the justifying (God) or passively receiving it in faith (humans).

Second, active and passive justification can be distinguished in terms of the role of faith. While active (objective) justification takes place in the tribunal of God and logically precedes faith, passive (subjective) justification takes place in the conscience of the sinner and logically follows faith (i.e., sinners are justified by faith). For Berkhof, the concept of justification before faith is not problematic, at least in the distinction between active and passive justification, for “active justification logically precedes faith,” and “[l]ogically, passive justification follows faith,” so “the two [active and passive justification] cannot be separated,” because “[t]he one is based on the other.” There is therefore only one reality—forgiveness of sins—but a twofold expression, with passive justification being based on active justification. This distinction reassures believers, for if they thought their justification were only the result of their own subjective faith in mens, maar ook tot de mens. Zodat men diezelfde daad van rechtvaardigen aanmerken kan, óf aan de zijde Gods, hoe God ze doet, óf aan de zijde des mensen, boe zij ze ontvangt. Als men ze aan de zijde Gods aanmerkt, dan wordt ze genoemd Justificatio activa, de dadelijke rechtvaardigmaking; als men ze aanmerkt aan de zijde des mensen, dan wordt ze genoemd Justificatio passiva, de lijdelijke rechtvaardigmaking.”

8 Berkhof, ST, 517.

9 Although Berkhof speaks of the idea of “justification before faith” in active justification, it does not mean at all that justification is already complete before faith. That’s why Berkhof later criticizes the notion of “justification from eternity” which is the idea of justification’s termination before faith, even in eternity. See Berkhof, ST, 517-519.

10 Berkhof, ST, 517.

11 Berkhof, ST, 517.
moments of weak faith they could doubt and even despair of their salvation. At such times the believer needs to know that justification does not depend wholly on personal subjective faith but on the objectivity of God’s gracious declaration. In this sense, active justification logically precedes faith.

These two points remind us that when we say that we are “justified by faith alone” this does not mean that justification comes primarily from human faith or from a self-induced moral change in the human heart. Rather, it is grounded primarily in the “objective” fact that human beings are declared righteous in the tribunal of a gracious God without assistance from the human “subject.” However, active justification does not negate the Protestant Reformation’s *sola fide*. As Bavinck notes, “Active justification has a tendency, so to speak, to communicate itself in faith and by faith to bring about its own acceptance.”

So although active justification logically precedes faith, it does not mean that faith is excluded. Active justification that logically precedes faith and passive justification that takes place in faith merely complement one another. In fact, God’s active justification becomes the “object” of justifying faith. In order to be saved we must believe that “it is God who justifies.”

Now on to the third point. Along with the two perspectives, i.e., the divine and the human, and the role of faith, active and passive justification are distinguished by *priority*. Daniel Wyttenbach (1706-1779) rightly refers to active justification as the “first justification” and passive justification as the “second justification,” with the second

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always following the first. Without the active the passive logically cannot happen. Thus Berkhof can say, “This is [active] justification in the most fundamental sense of the word. It is basic to what is called subjective [passive] justification.”14 In this context it is understood that this priority is logical but not temporal. In Bavinck’s words: “[C]ertainly one must take account of the fact that the above distinction [between active and passive justification], though it has logical import, has no temporal significance.”15 This is important because failure to recognize it opens the door to the idea of eternal justification or to antinomianism.16

Although the Reformed theologians who affirm active justification all agree on its basic meaning, there are differences in emphasis. Maccovius took it to a higher level of abstraction, making a scholastic distinction between *actu esse* (actual existence) and *esse cognitum* (cognitive existence) in order to lay emphasis on the idea that it is enough for us to be only “in the mind of God” (*esse cognitum*) to legitimately be the objects of God’s justifying grace.17 This line of thought does not appear in other writers such as à Brakel, Turretin, Bavinck, or Berkhof et al. who choose to simply emphasize the divine initiative in justification; Maccovius’ distinction is also of no concern to writers who

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17 See Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 174: “Esse reale & esse Cognitionis, sive esse Cognitum, idem est quod esse rei & Objectum. Ut omnes res fuerunt in Deo quantum ad esse cognitum, sed esse reale acceperunt in tempore.” Van den Brink and Jones use this distinction to argue that Maccovius does not hold the idea of justification from eternity. See Van den Brink, “Johannes Maccovius,” 345-346; Beeke and Jones, “Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius,” 144-145.
focus on the idea that justification prior to faith is the core of active justification.  

Historical context also plays a role; those who had to contend with antinomianism, including William Twisse (c.1577-1646) and William Eyre (1642-1660), held that justification before faith is an immanent act of God from eternity but did not camp on the idea of justification preceding faith, focusing instead on the divine initiative in justification.

3.2. Biblical Foundation of Active Justification

The foundation of active justification is Christ’s perfect righteousness and its merit. In justification, writes Berkhof, “[the sinner] is declared righteous in view of the fact that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. In this transaction God appears, not as an absolute Sovereign who simply sets the law aside, but as a righteous Judge, who acknowledges the infinite merits of Christ as a sufficient basis for justification, and as a

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18 Those who are well aware of the danger of eternal justification, but still speak of active justification (e.g., à Brakel) tend to less connect between active justification and the idea of justification before faith in comparison to Maccovius.

19 The antinomian error will be concretely dealt with in a later section.

gracious Father, who *freely forgives* and accepts the sinner” (emphasis added).  

With the foundation of active justification in place, the sinner can appropriate this justification by faith alone (passive justification). Sinners must believe that God justifies them on the basis of Christ’s satisfaction and righteousness.

Leonard Rijssen (or Leonhard Ryssen, c.1636-1700) offers three biblical passages to emphasize Christ’s role in reconciliation and justification, stating that “this [active justification] occurs in paradise and by promise (Gen. 3:15), in Christ the Head (2 Cor. 5:19), and in his Word (Rom. 1:8).” For Rijssen, active justification is neither God’s thinking alone, nor a subjective reasoning; rather it is firmly grounded on the “objective” Messianic promise that the woman’s offspring (Christ) will strike the serpent’s (Satan’s) head (Gen 3:15); God will not count trespasses of human beings against them in Christ (2 Cor 5:19); and there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ (Rom 1:8).

Herman Witsius (1636-1708) also interprets the Genesis 3:15 narrative as the *protoevangelium* (“first good news”), stating that “in the first Gospel promise [πρωτευαγγελιω, Gen 3:15]; which presupposes that [suretyship] of Christ, whereby he took upon himself all the sins of the elect, and on account of which God

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23 “[T]hat is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”

24 “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.” See also Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 557.
declared, he never intended to exact them from any of his chosen.”

In his exposition of Genesis 3:15 Maccovius also finds that “[a]ctive justification has happened when God promised us Christ as the Mediator.” Thus according to these Reformed theologians the final basis for active justification is Christ’s perfect righteousness and messianic work which are promised by God in Genesis 3:15.

Other biblical passages also explicitly support active justification when they say that God actively and objectively decrees and promises to justify sinners in foro Dei. For example, Romans 8:30a (“those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified”) and Romans 3:24a (“they are now justified by his grace as a gift”) refer to the objective, decisive, and free character of justification. On the basis of

25 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.VIII.LVII (p.296-297); Witsius, Economy, 1:420. “Haec enim omnia πρωτευαγγελίῳ continentur: quod supponit, eam Christi sponsionem, qua peccata omnia electorum in se suscepit, & propter quam declaravit Deus, non esse sibi animum ea a quoquam electorum exigendi.”


these texts, WCF 11.4 says that “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification.”

Active justification is the idea that God justifies on the basis of His promise given in the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15 and grounded in Christ’s mediatorial headship and suretyship (Rom 8:30a, Rom 3:24a). In passive justification, human beings are justified by believing God’s promise that Christ’s perfect righteousness is theirs (1 Cor 1:30).

3.3. Doctrinal Development and Theological Context
As most subtle scholastic distinctions are, the distinction between active and passive justification was one of the elegant theological responses to the doctrinal kaleidoscope that appeared in the post-Reformation era. New theological questions demanded more thoughtful answers; the distinction between active and passive justification was the theological reaction to a series of mutations coming from England in the early 1600s,

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29 Here “scholastic” or “scholasticism” should not be regarded as a particular theological or philosophical content, or as a speculative form of Aristotelian philosophy, or as the assimilating of “scholasticism” of seventeenth-century Protestants into the “scholasticism” of the Middle Ages. Rather, these terms were a method of the classroom and of the more detailed systems of theology during the era of orthodoxy. For a detailed discussion on the “scholasticism” of Protestant orthodoxy, see Richard A. Muller, After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25–46; idem, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:27–84 (hereafter, PRRD); W. J. van Asselt et al., Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism, trans. Albert Gootjes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 1–9.
especially antinomianism and the notion of justification from eternity.\textsuperscript{30} Bavinck notes that the distinction between active and passive justification does not specifically appear in the works of the Reformers.\textsuperscript{32} In their polemic against the Roman Catholic idea of justification merited by human works, the Reformers spoke of justification as a concrete and singular gift of God’s grace received in faith \textit{sola fide}.\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore, they did not deal directly with justification from eternity and felt no pressing need to deal with antinomianism.\textsuperscript{34}

This changed in the seventeenth century. The distinction between active and passive justification was developed by the Reformed orthodox theologians to respond directly to these two issues.\textsuperscript{35} As examples we point to the writings of John Eaton (c.1574-c.1630), Tobias Crisp (1600-1643), and John Saltmarsh (d.1647).\textsuperscript{36} All three


\textsuperscript{31} Bavinck, \textit{GD}, 4:184-185 (§51.472); \textit{RD}, 4:202-203.

\textsuperscript{32} Yet, Brian Cummings tries to explain Martin Luther’s doctrine of justification in the distinction of active/passive justification. Yet, Cummings’ distinction, which is based on a grammatical approach, differs from the distinction that has been dealt with here so far. For in Cummings’ analysis, passive justification (by which God is justified by our faith, we are justified) is our own active justification by God. See Brian Cummings, \textit{The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93-95. On Bavinck’s account of Luther’s distinction of active/passive justification, see Bavinck, \textit{GD}, 4:173 (§51.469); \textit{RD}, 4:191.


\textsuperscript{34} Bavinck, \textit{GD}, 4:184-185 (§51.472); \textit{RD}, 4:202-203.


\textsuperscript{36} See John Eaton, \textit{The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone Collected Out of the Meere Authorities of Scripture and Common and Unanimous Consent of the Faithfull Interpreters and Dispensers of Gods Mysteries Upon the Same, Especially as They Expresse the Excellency of Free
were concerned about Arminian ideas that credited human willingness and ability as fundamental to justification.\(^{37}\) In an example of argumentative overreach, they went so far as to say that justification was freely obtained only by virtue of Christ’s complete work (thus, even apart from faith); for them this meant that there is then no sin in the presence of God.\(^{38}\) By claiming reliance only on the absolute perfection of Christ’s work, and the resultant sinless status of believers in the sight of God, these antinomian theologians negated the role of faith in justification. They could then also set aside the need for daily prayers for forgiveness and the need to obey God’s law, and even eliminate the call to sanctification. Understandably, this stance aroused significant opposition.\(^{39}\)

Samuel Maresius (1599-1673), Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633-1698), Herman Witsius, Francis Turretin, Leonard Rijssen, and Johannes Maccovius also respond critically to the antinomian writings of the mid-1600’s using the distinction between active and passive justification.\(^{40}\) They wrote to provide a more balanced understanding

\(^{37}\) Thus, McKelvey observes: “All antinomians were anti-Arminian but not all anti-Arminians were antinomian.” See McKelvey, “That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism,” 262.


\(^{39}\) The leading opponents of Antinomians in England during the seventeenth century are Henry Burton (1578-1648), Anthony Burgess (d.1664), Daniel Williams (1643-1716), Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), Stephen Geree (1594-1656), Thomas Bakewell (c.1618-), Thomas Bedford (d.1653), Richard Baxter (1615-1691), Thomas Gataker (1574-1654), etc.

\(^{40}\) See, e.g., Maresius, *Collegium theologicum sive systema breve universae theologiae*, 11.58 (pp. 255-256); Heidegger, *Corpus theologiae christianae*, 27.28-29 (p. 303); Witsius, *Economy*, 2.16 (pp. 248-249); Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:669, 684; Rijssen, *Summa theologiae elencticae completa*, 14 (pp. 184-198); Maccovius, *Distinctiones*, 13 (pp. 124-129).
of justification as opposed to the antinomian view in which passive justification is overshadowed by an excessive emphasis on active justification. Similarly, post-seventeenth century theologians including Heinrich Heppe (1820-1879), Herman Bavinck, and Louis Berkhof were also concerned with the balance between the active and passive aspects of justification.\footnote{See Heppe, \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}, 555-559; Bavinck, \textit{RD}, 4:202-204, 219-223; Berkhof, \textit{ST}, 516-517.}

3.4. Misunderstanding, Neglect, and Misuse of Active Justification

Notwithstanding the historical importance of the notion of active justification, it has its contemporary critics and has often been neglected and misused. The thesis of this study is that most of the criticism involves three specific charges. First, we will refute the charge that the notion of active justification undermines the Reformation’s bedrock principle of \textit{sola fide}. Second, we will discredit the claim that active justification leads to antinomianism. Third, we will disprove the argument that active justification is complete in an immanent act of God from eternity as presented in hyper-Calvinism.

3.4.1. Misunderstanding: Active Justification Undermines the Reformation’s Doctrine of Justification \textit{sola fide}

3.4.1.1. Tipton’s Argument

Lane Tipton advanced the argument that the distinction between active and passive justification undermines the fundamental principle of the Reformation that justification is
by faith alone (sola fide). Tipton does not entirely reject the distinction formulated by Louis Berkhof, in particular the distinction between justification “in the tribunal of God” (in foro Dei; objective justification) and justification “in the heart or conscience of the sinner” (in foro conscientiae; subjective justification). But Tipton considers Berkhof’s placement of faith after active justification and before passive justification to be “clouded” reasoning that “raises concerns.” Tipton contends that if active justification entails a precedence over faith and passive justification, the notion is “not possible from a biblical and confessional perspective” and therefore, it needs to be “abandon[ed].”

Tipton provides two complementary reasons for this strong judgment. He believes that positing a precedence of active justification prior to faith contradicts the scriptural truth which emphasizes the necessary link between justification and faith, and

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43 Cf. Berkhof, ST, 517. The distinction between in foro Dei (in the tribunal of God) and in foro conscientiae (in the tribunal of conscience) in justification is not Berkhof’s unique invention. In the context of anti-Arminian soteriology in the seventeenth century, a number of Reformed theologians have used this distinction to either endorse or analyze carefully regarding the idea of justification before faith. See, e.g., William Pemble, Vindiciae Gratiae. A Plea for Grace More Especially the Grace of Faith. Or, Certain Lectures as Touching the Nature and Properties of Grace and Faith (London: Printed by Humphrey Lownes, 1629), 21-22; William Twisse, Vindiciæ gratiæ, 2.4.4 (p. 79). Whether those who use the distinction between justification in foro Dei and in foro conscientiae inevitably hold the idea of justification from eternity is controversial. For example, whereas Dewey Wallace thinks that Pemble teaches the idea of eternal justification, Hans Boersma does not think so because he sees that Pumble does not place justification in foro divino in eternity. See Wallace, Puritans and Predestination, 119; Boersma, A Hot Pepper Corn, 73. Tipton’s affirmation can be seen in the following passage: “Certainly this distinction is valid and useful. The declaration of justification has unique reference to the tribunal of God’s justice: the sinner’s legal relationship to the tribunal of God’s justice is changed in justification. The declaration of justification occurring in the tribunal of God is the objective reality that the sinner comes to know as true by faith ‘in his heart or conscience.’ What the sinner receives by faith in Christ (passive justification) is a declaration of righteousness that obtains before the tribunal of God’s justice (active justification).” See Tipton, “Biblical Theology,” 8.


thus “clouds a clear affirmation of justification sola fide.” In other words, according to Tipton justification prior to faith (active) and justification based on faith alone (sola fide) are mutually exclusive and contradictory.

Tipton’s second reason for rejecting the idea of active justification has to do with the relationship between faith and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. According to Tipton, if the declaration which is grounded on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness does not also bring faith into view, it becomes just a “legal fiction” or a mere “judicial declaration.” Tipton insists that justification (whether active or passive) is obtained solely by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness achieved by faith alone. If active justification logically precedes faith, then sola fide does not apply. Tipton therefore insists that Berkhof’s formulation “does not cohere with a biblical or confessional notion of justification by faith alone by virtue of union with Christ.” He concludes that “we must avoid at all costs speculative, dogmatic constructions . . . that make the declaration of righteousness logically prior to union with Christ by faith,” inasmuch as they eventually “cloud the precious biblical truth that believers are justified only by faith.” Is this a tenable and justifiable conclusion? We will address this in the next section.

3.4.1.2. A Response to Tipton

We fully concur with Tipton’s concern to protect and sustain the Reformation’s doctrine of justification *sola fide* as well as his insistence on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as the foundation of justifying grace. Nevertheless, Tipton’s application of this truth to the distinction between active and passive justification is misplaced. Tipton speaks as though justification is both realized and terminated in active justification when he says that “the matter becomes more concerning when . . . Berkhof is suggesting that the declaration of the sinner’s righteousness logically precedes faith, by which the sinner is united to Christ in his effectual calling and by which the sinner receives the imputed righteousness of Christ.”\(^{51}\) Tipton’s argument is something like this: since justification—which can only be obtained by the imputed righteousness of Christ through faith—is said to be realized *without* faith as it is in active justification it contradicts the doctrine of justification *sola fide* and therefore must be abandoned.

The problem with this line of thinking is that it overlooks Berkhof’s point “that the two [active and passive justification] cannot be separated.”\(^{52}\) Tipton’s strategy of trying to show that the absence of faith in *active* justification means that faith is absent in justification *altogether* is fatally flawed. Justification *sola fide* is referenced in passive justification since active justification is the *object* of the faith that saves.

What then of the concern to maintain the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to

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\(^{52}\) Berkhof, *ST*, 517; the principle that active justification and passive justification are logically distinct but inseparable is also clearly taught by Bavinck; cf. *GD*, 4:203 (§51.475); *RD*, 4:219. This “inseparability” of the two will be concretely dealt with in Chapter 4 of this study. They always go together without separation.
believers as the sole ground of justification *sola fide*? Is it true that because the imputation of Christ’s righteousness requires faith, a declaration of righteousness without faith in active justification becomes just a “legal fiction” which does not have a real and actual effect? Tipton’s argument can be stated like this:

1. First premise: Justification is based on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness which is received *sola fide*.
2. Second Premise: Faith follows and is therefore not a factor in active justification.
3. Conclusion: The declaration of imputed righteousness to believers in active justification is a ‘legal fiction’ because faith is absent.

The presupposition of Tipton’s objection is that imputation and faith must somehow also function in the sphere of active justification. But this misses Berkhof’s point, which is not that the whole of justification is actualized and terminated in active justification, but that the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is the “objective ground” for accomplishing passive justification, so that imputation is realized in the heart and conscience of the sinner by faith alone. Justification in its fullness is realized not just in active or objective justification alone but together with passive or subjective justification.

There is another curious matter contained in Tipton’s conclusion. In order to show the necessity of faith in imputation, he must place more emphasis on *how* Christ’s righteousness is to be imputed (i.e., by faith alone) than on the *content* of faith (what one

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54 Berkhof, *ST*, 517: “A purely objective justification [active justification] that is not brought home to the sinner would not answer the purpose. The granting of a pardon would mean nothing to a prisoner, unless the glad tidings were communicated to him and the doors of the prison were opened.”
should believe). In other words, by pointing to the supposed “fictional” character of imputation in active justification Tipton overemphasizes the importance of the instrumental function of faith in imputation.\(^\text{55}\) Such an overemphasis leads to the idea that faith itself imputes righteousness which would then imperil the crucial Reformation principle that our righteousness comes solely by grace from God (sola gratia), through faith (διά as a receptive instrument), thanks to Christ.\(^\text{56}\) We are not of course suggesting that Tipton holds to the notion of meritorious faith as the grounds for justification.\(^\text{57}\) However, what is lacking in Tipton’s conclusion is the proper “object” of faith. This absence becomes conspicuous when we compare his view with that of the Westminster...
Confession of Faith which is as concerned with the object of justifying faith as it is with faith’s instrumentality. In WCF 11.1 the object of belief is the imputation of Christ’s “obedience” and “satisfaction” to the sinner. It states, “He [God] also freely justifieth; . . . [not] by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God” (emphasis added). Therefore, in order to be justified one must receive and rest on Christ’s obedience and satisfaction (the object of belief, WCF 11.1) through (διὰ) faith (the instrumental cause). In emphasizing faith’s instrumental function, Tipton pays too little attention to the object, namely, Christ’s meritorious works (obedience and satisfaction). Without the object of belief, the act of believing is empty. When we speak of sola fide we must not restrict our understanding to the act of believing but must include the content, the what (or Who) of believing. This idea is included in the very definition of active justification.

Tipton also confuses matters when he raises questions about the placement of active justification in the ordo salutis. He supposes that “active justification is a blessing of redemption applied (ordo salutis).” While Tipton does not explain this term clearly,

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59 Here, Christ’s obedience includes both the active obedience (Christ’s perfect obedience to the law of God) and the passive obedience (Christ’s enduring the punishment of the crucifixion suffering and death). Yet there has been an argument which rejects Christ’s active obedience. It was by Johannes Piscator (1526-1625). On this, see Heber Carlos De Campos Júnior, “Johannes Piscator (1526-1625) and the Consequent Development of the Doctrine of the Imputation of Christ’s Active Obedience” (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2011).

it appears that he considers active justification as an independent moment in the *ordo salutis*. His argument is that “… if active justification is a blessing of redemption applied (*ordo salutis*), and if active justification logically precedes faith, then active justification logically precedes faith-union with Christ.”\(^{61}\) However, active justification does not stand alone as a dimension in the *ordo salutis*. Instead it is only one of two inseparable dimensions of the same reality, i.e., “justification” in the classic *ordo*. We saw in the previous chapter that definitive and progressive sanctification are the two inseparable dimensions of one reality, i.e., “sanctification” in the classic *ordo salutis*.\(^{62}\) In parallel with this, active justification serves as the “object” of passive justification *sola fide*, thus marking the two of them as the logically inseparable dimensions of justification in the classic *ordo*.

In conclusion, it must be said that Tipton tends to overlook the historical background of both the imperative and the theological motivation for developing the doctrine of active justification, and the richness of the ensuing theological discussions. As the following section makes clear, the distinction between active and passive justification has played a valuable role in opposing antinomianism as well as neonomianism in the seventeenth century. A healthy balance between the two aspects of justification was then available to block the misuse of active justification in the hyper-Calvinism of the eighteenth century. Tipton acknowledges that a theological motivation for the distinction

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\(^{62}\) On this, see section 2.4.2.2 of this study.
could be seen as “noble.”\footnote{Tipton, “Biblical Theology,” 12.} We would state it more strongly: the distinction between active and passive justification is crucial and should not be abandoned or neglected but its theological legacy respected.\footnote{Heppe states: “[T]he distinction between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ justification is immovably fixed in Reformed dogmatics.” See Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, 553. The theological and practical significance and meaningfulness of the distinction of active/passive justification will be dealt with in detail in chapter 8 of this study.}

3.4.2. Neglect: Opening the Door to Antinomianism

We now consider the consequences of neglecting the doctrine of active justification, or more precisely, neglecting the important distinction between active and passive justification. We find that the distinction was largely developed to oppose the antinomian error. While there were variations among individual theologians alleged to be guilty of antinomianism, in general they held the following tenets in common: (1) Christians are freely justified in God’s sight, solely by grace (i.e., not by faith); (2) by virtue of Christ’s complete satisfaction for sin, God sees justified people as sinless; (3) sinless Christians, because of Christ’s perfect substitutionary atonement, are liberated from and not obligated to keep the law. The distinction between active and passive justification invalidates this mistaken application of the doctrine of justification. Ironically, the danger of antinomianism arises from the same emphasis that we find in advocates of active justification, namely an emphasis on the objective justification of sinners in the court of God \textit{(in foro Dei)}. What antinomians fail to see is that active justification affirms that in fact perfect justice requires the fulfillment of the law’s demands; thus they miss the real...
meaning of active justification and fail to make the distinction between it and passive justification. Berkhof captures this well when he clarifies, “This declaration [active justification] is not a declaration in which God simply acquits the sinner, without taking any account of the claims of justice, but is rather a divine declaration that, in the case of the sinner under consideration, the demands of the law are met” (emphasis added). Heppe distinguishes active and passive justification similarly: “In the former case [i.e., active justification] justification of the elect results in a complete ‘single act’ once and for all . . . passive justification remains at the best of times so imperfect here on earth, that the believer must cry to God daily for forgiveness of his past and his future sins.” We find the same point made by Wilhelmus à Brakel.

3.4.2.1. Important Historical Background in the Development of Antinomianism

The story of antinomianism in sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritan thought,

65 Berkhof, ST, 517.

66 Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, 555.

67 In the preface of the second volume of à Brakel’s Christians’ Reasonable Service, Joel Beeke states that “[b]earing this statement [the devil is continually engaged in denying, perverting, and obscuring the truth expressed in the doctrine of justification], combined with à Brakel’s grave concern for the antinomian error, it will be understood why he places strong emphasis on the need for both the personal experience of justification in the heart of a sinner, as well as the need for a daily and repeated sense of justification.” See à Brakel, The Christian’s Reasonable Service, xvii (preface, 2nd vol.).

68 Using –ism needs to be careful since it typically runs a risk of oversimplifying a diverse spectrum and color. As Como rightly points out, “antinomianism” during the seventeenth century needs to regard as “shared characteristics” of the theology of certain individuals in England or New England. See DavidComo, Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 33-38. Even Richard Baxter who is one of the eager opponents to antinomianism also recognizes the diverse spectrum of antinomianism: “Though as I know every Antinomian holdeth not them [forty antinomian theses that Baxter proposes], so I will not call them Antinomians that hold but some of the lesser and more innocent; (though I think the least be very bad.).” See Richard Baxter, Rich: Baxter’s Confession [sic] of His Faith, Especially Concerning the Interest of Repentance and Sincere Obedience to Christ, in Our Justification & Salvation (London, 1655), 151. Nevertheless, Baxter still tends to think antinomianism in a quite overgeneralized sense. Anthony
including its origins, is complex and far beyond the scope of this study.\textsuperscript{69} The most sympathetic treatment helps to get at the root of the problem: Antinomian theologians tend to be radically anti-Arminian\textsuperscript{70} and zealous about eliminating any works or merit in human salvation; even instrumental faith can be conceived as a “good work.” This is why the antinomianist perspective we portrayed in the previous section focuses so radically and tragically on God’s work in justification at the expense of \textit{sola fide}. This brings to mind one of the conventional criticisms of Calvinism, i.e., its doctrine of predestination, and it is therefore not surprising that historians point out similarities between Calvinist Puritan thought and antinomianism. For example, T. D. Bozeman claims that there was an “antinomian backlash” within the Puritan tradition from the start, since Puritans tended to adjure Christians to fulfill “precise” or “exact walking” in Christian practice.\textsuperscript{71}

However, while acknowledging that there might be some plausibility in seeing antinomianism as “contra-Puritan,” David Como still notes the similarity to Calvinist Puritanism.\textsuperscript{72} From this perspective antinomianism can be classified as “extreme

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\textsuperscript{70} McKelvey, “That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism,” 262.


\textsuperscript{72} Como, \textit{Blown by the Spirit}, 176-218. According to Como, as like Puritan teaching, Eaton also teaches the doctrine of imputation which is based on Christ’s active and passive obedience.
Calvinism.” Further confirmation of this can be found in repudiated antinomians, such as Eaton, Crisp, and Saltmarsh, who accept a traditional Reformed soteriology in which sinners are justified by having Christ’s perfect righteousness imputed unto them (Rom 5:9, 1 Cor 6:11). All guilt and iniquity is forgiven once and for all thanks to the blood of Christ shed on the cross (Isa 53:3-5), and Christ’s substitutionary atonement fully liberates them from the power of evil (Acts 15:11; 26:18). The problem of antinomianism, therefore, is that the zeal to defend the completely gratuitous character of salvation led to an extreme imbalance that is only corrected by the proper distinction between active and passive justification. Even though their theological motivation may have been sincere, it is undeniable that antinomians made a critical mistake by trying to deny human activity a place in Christian doctrine and practice. This is why they are called the “unwelcome guests” of Reformed theology.

3.4.2.2. A Case Study in Anti-Arminian Antinomianism: John Eaton

In the previous section we pointed out that ardent anti-Arminianism was a major factor leading to the development of antinomianism. The controversial John Eaton (1575–

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74 The vivid characteristic of Eaton, Crisp, and Saltmarsh’s antinomian writing is a Christology-centered. On the emphasis of Christ’s righteousness and blood for justification, see Saltmarsh, *Free Grace*, 29-30, 63-64, 104-105, 134-135, 175-176. In addition, there are other theological continuities between antinomians and the traditional Reformed theology. For example, Saltmarsh admits the idea of double predestination (see Saltmarsh, *Free Grace*, 104) and Crisp, the substitutionary atonement (see Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 2:64, 78, 91-100, 252-253, 272-277).


76 Jones, *Antinomianism*. 
vicar of Wickham-Market in Suffolk from 1625 until his death, serves as a good
illustration of what happens when anti-Arminianism is taken to an extreme without the
counterbalance of the distinction between active and passive justification. Eaton wrote his
*The Honey-Combe of Free Justification* (1642) to show how the Christian doctrine of
justification is sweet and precious only when it is understood as *free* grace that is based
on Christ’s perfect righteousness and absolute atonement apart from a human work.
While this intention is honorable, the solution proposed by Eaton is extreme and it is not
surprising that his work was judged by many of his contemporaries to be flawed and
hurtful to Christian living.  

Eaton’s fundamental intention in writing *The Honey-Combe* was to eradicate the
“dead faith” of papists and even Protestants who tried to hold justification in “a carnal
humane witted-fashion” using “natural reason [as] their chiepest guide.” He wrote that
such views deprive Christians of “all sweetness” in the doctrine and show that they
“understand not the nature and excellency of Free Justification.” Eaton therefore made
a powerful attempt to erase human sense, feeling, reason, and indeed any human effort

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77 John Eaton (fl.1619), divine, born in Kent in or about 1575, was educated at Trinity College,
Oxford, where he became the first recipient of the newly founded Blount exhibition in 1590. He proceeded
1900*, vol. 16 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885), 336-337.

78 Although the attempt to neutralize at least a pejorative tone from contemporaries’ criticism to
Eaton is needed to a certain extent, their theological judgment mostly hits the mark. See, e.g., Burton, *The
Law and the Gospel*; Thomas Taylor, *Regula Vitae the Rule of the Law Under the Gospel* (London, 1631);
Geree, *The Doctrine of the Antinomians*; Thomas Bakewell, *A Short View of the Antinomian Errors with a
Briefe and Plaine Answer to Them* (London, 1643); Thomas Bedford, *An Examination of the Chief Points
of Antinomianism* (London, 1647); Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist*.

79 Eaton, *The Honey-Combe*, 44.

80 Eaton, *The Honey-Combe*, 44.
from the realm of justification in order to be assured that justification is free grace and a
sole gift from God. Eaton emphatically exclaimed, “[K]ill reason, a great and mighty
enemy of God.” According to him, believers are justified neither by “sense and
feeling,” nor by “faith indeed,” but only “by the blood of the Son of God.”

By preaching the “excellency of Free Justification,” Eaton advanced the idea that
“the Devil is overthrown, his kingdom is destroyed; the law, sin, and death (wherewith as
most mighty and invincible tyrants, he hath brought all mankind in subjection under his
dominion) are wrested out of his hands.” Throughout The Honey-Combe Eaton
hammers on free justification purely sola gratia, while denying the teachings of Roman
Catholics (human preparation), Protestants (employing faith as an instrumental cause),
and Arminianism (making space for human participation in salvation). Since Eaton
believes these teachings to be “works of the Devil,” he forcefully declares the need to
“root up” the problem.

Eaton develops his argument by borrowing from Scripture the analogy of a
wedding, defining justification of sinners: “by the power of God’s imputation [sinners are]
clothed with the wedding garment of Christ’s own perfect righteousness.” In his
mind this imputation not only consists of the complete and perfect righteousness of

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82 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 249.
83 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 36.
84 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 5-6.
85 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 5.
86 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 7.
Christ’s substitutionary atonement on the cross but it is also actualized there.\textsuperscript{87} With this Eaton radically alters the way that Reformed orthodox theologians had used Aristotle’s fourfold causality to explain divine initiative in salvation. Eaton agrees that the \textit{material} cause is faith; the \textit{formal} (or meritorious) cause is the active and passive obedience of Christ; the \textit{efficient} cause of justification is the Triune God and Jesus Christ; and the \textit{final} cause is God’s glory and grace.\textsuperscript{88} However, in his understanding of how the material cause (faith) is performed in the realm of justification he departs radically from the Reformed tradition.

In the traditional view, held for example by Anthony Burgess (d.1664), faith functions as the “instrumental cause” so that sinners are justified through faith (not active, but a receptive instrumental tool).\textsuperscript{89} However, in Eaton’s conception of justification, faith functions as a tool to believe the already-achieved fact that “this wedding-garment of Christ’s righteousness [actually did] make us thus perfectly holy and righteous in the sight of God freely.”\textsuperscript{90} According to his logic, justification precedes faith and faith acts to discern what is already done.\textsuperscript{91} Eaton’s “free justification in the sight of

\textsuperscript{87} Eaton states: “[B]y the second Adam, it [imputation] is mystically above sense, and feeling, that it may be by the faith of God’s power, made so truly and really righteous to God-ward, that it cannot but in time [emphasis added], by discerning Christ’s love inherently and actively, declare the same afterwards to men-ward by sanctification.” See Eaton, \textit{The Honey-Combe}, 293. For Eaton’s emphasis on Christ’s atonement work, see Eaton, \textit{The Honey-Combe}, 361-363.

\textsuperscript{88} Eaton, \textit{The Honey-Combe}, 258-322.

\textsuperscript{89} Burgess, \textit{The True Doctrine of Justification}, 2, 170, 182, 257. Not only he but also many other opponents to antinomianism stress the instrumental causality of faith in justification. See Bedford, \textit{An Examination}, 5; Geree, \textit{The Doctrine of the Antinomians}, 85-86; Bakewell, \textit{A Short View of the Antinomian Errors}, 1, 3. According to Baxter, the instrument of justification is the new covenant, not faith. On Baxter’s denial of the instrumental cause of faith, see Baxter, \textit{Aphorismes of Justification} (London, 1649), 219-224. Cf. Packer, \textit{The Redemption & Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter}, 254-255.

\textsuperscript{90} Eaton, \textit{The Honey-Combe}, 280. See also Crisp, \textit{Christ Alone Exalted}, 2:198-199.

\textsuperscript{91} Yet, there is a tension in Eaton’s view of faith; for sometimes Eaton speaks of justification by
“God” is conceptually similar to our definition of active justification; both provide the objective content of faith, what we called earlier “the object of belief.” The critical difference is that in the classic distinction between active and passive justification the fullness of a believer’s justification includes the subjective appropriation by faith. As Louis Berkhof puts it: “A purely objective [active] justification that is not brought home to the sinner would not answer the purpose. The granting of a pardon would mean nothing to a prisoner, unless the glad tidings were communicated to him and the doors of the prison were opened.” It is this important point that Eaton misses. In his estimation, justification is already actualized in the sight of God freely at the cross. Here “freely at the cross” means that nothing (including faith, any kind of instrumental causality, or even the aspect of passive justification) is necessary for a believer’s justification because Christ has already done literally “everything” in the past (but not in eternity) in the sight of God. This difference is crucial, for his argument undermines justification sola fide and ends in an erroneous view of “sin.”

We see clearly how radical Eaton’s views were when we consider his comments on sin and the believer. “God doth so remove away the sins of the faithful out of his sight,” he says, “[so] that they may never return into his sight anymore.” Since God has “cast all our sins into the bottom of the Sea,” there “remains no scar, nor any print

faith (but not as a meritorious condition). See Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 190-191.

92 Berkhof, ST, 517.

93 Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 30. Crisp also similarly states: “I speak of justification before God . . . That a person justified before God is such a one, who when God himself makes search to try this person, whether he be guilty, or not guilty of a crime, he finds no crime upon him; and upon the not finding any crime upon him, he pronounceth him a just person.” See Crisp, Christ Alone Exalted, 2:190.
thereof." Eaton even assures us that “there is no sin in the Church anymore” if true believers in the church believe what Christ did on the cross. Eaton therefore passionately contends, “he [God] doth see no sin in his justified children.” While Como’s claim that Eaton’s language here is “imputational” rather than “perfectionist” thus providing a more temperate reading, Eaton’s claim that God does not see sin at all in the believer’s life goes far beyond the proper emphasis on the “reality” of Christ’s righteousness being perfectly imputed to sinners. It was this that led Eaton’s contemporaries to harshly rebuke him. For example, Thomas Bakewell (c.1618-) asserted that “God sees all the sins of his justified children, both before and after conversion.” Burgess also took exception, saying that “the sins of godly men [can] not cease to be sins, though they are justified”; for sin “sticks till death.” He strongly criticized Eaton’s insistence that God does not see “sin in his justified children.” Justified people do sin, God sees it and “a loving Father is very angry, and much displeased with it.”

94 Eaton, *The Honey-Combe*, 34.
95 Eaton, *The Honey-Combe*, 41.
Father he is *angry* with them, and that makes him *to chastise* them” (emphasis in the original).103 God’s wrath toward sin, according to Burgess, is not judicial punishment, but a fatherly chastisement in a pedagogical sense.104 Burgess therefore concludes, “[I]t is true . . . that if you suppose a justified person not to repent of his grievous sins committed, you may also suppose him to die in the displeasure and eternal *wrath of God*” (emphasis in the original).105

The practical consequence of Eaton’s argument would be that it sets aside our Lord’s instruction that His followers are to pray among other things that He “forgive[s] us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Eaton maintains that a daily prayer to beg for forgiveness of sin is “needless.”106 Having put on Christ’s wedding garment of imputed righteousness the believer is “once justified, . . . *justified forever*” (emphasis added).107 “[O]ur manifold daily infirmities” and “all the displeasure and anger of God for our sins,” according to Eaton, are “done away, and utterly abolished from between God and us.”108 Burgess counters that “it is the duty of justified persons to pray for the forgiveness of their sins” because “we renew sin daily, therefore there is need of a *daily pardon*” (emphasis in the original).109

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105 Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification*, 84.


108 Eaton, *The Honey-Combe*, 408; there is a real tension in Eaton’s understanding of prayer in that he deems it useful for Christians so that they can have a better *experience* of forgiveness, including assurance. (See *The Honey-Combe*, 154-156).

There is an unintended consequence of Eaton’s thesis that sin is completely eradicated in those who are justified in front of God; it also precludes the necessity for sanctification. Eaton does mention the usefulness of sanctification elsewhere, so it is not totally disregarded by him. This is why many scholars prefer to think of Eaton as a moderate antinomian rather than a full-blown one.

In summary, by strongly denigrating any human activity in the realm of justification Eaton is saying that God does not see sin at all in those who are justified before Him. However, at other times Eaton appears somewhat ambivalent since elsewhere he concedes the need for sanctification, and even repentance and prayer.

3.4.2.3. How Eaton’s View Differs from Active Justification

Though there are obvious similarities between Eaton’s view and our understanding of active justification, they are not identical. It is true that in both conceptions divine agency is primary, justification precedes faith, and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is the foundation for justification. However, Eaton fails to incorporate either the simultaneity of active and passive justification or the necessity of passive justification sola fide to complete his understanding of justification based on Christ’s imputed righteousness.

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110 Specifically, see Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 22, 296, 340, 458, 476, 483–484. Eaton even contends elsewhere that there is still a usefulness and meaningfulness in daily prayer for three reasons: through praying, (1) a more glorious forgiveness can be experienced; (2) a more comfortable feeling and fuller assurance can be gained; and (3) the fruit of justification can be more vividly seen. See Eaton, The Honey-Combe, 154-156.

111 See, e.g., Como, Blown by the Spirit, 176-218. Cf. Bozeman states: Eaton’s theology “was less a radicalization of historic Puritan doctrine and more an oblique or tangential development whose conscious effort was to obliterate that doctrine and replace it with an entirely new point of view.” See Bozeman, “The Glory of the ‘Third Time,’” 654.
Eaton only sees a portion of the dimension of active justification and misses the
dimension of passive justification altogether. Since Eaton’s *The Honey-Combe* was
published posthumously in 1642\(^{112}\) and the theological discussion about active and
passive justification took place in the period from about 1650 to 1690, more than likely
he was unaware of the distinction. Even if we restrict ourselves to a gentler criticism by
calling his formulations immature and imprecise, we should still be mindful of the
potentially fatal consequences of his views. In Eaton’s antinomian construct the principle
*sola gratia* describes the entire process of justification, not only by excluding Christian
practice and discipline but even *sola fide* itself from his understanding of justification. As
a result, passive justification is eclipsed by his one-sided emphasis of active justification.

3.4.3. Misuse: Opening the Door to Hyper-Calvinism

The distinction between active and passive justification was developed in part as a
response to the antinomianism of second-generation Reformed thinkers like Eaton. The
distinction offered greater theological precision, and its use by Reformed orthodoxy was
well established during the seventeenth century. Moving into the eighteenth century the
distinction did not disappear; in fact it was even more actively promoted by English
Baptists including John Gill (1697-1771) and John Brine (sometimes called Braine;
1703-1765).\(^{113}\) However, these men used the notion of active justification to propose that

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\(^{112}\) The time of Eaton’s death is uncertain. 1641 has traditionally assigned by Anthony à Wood,
but its credibility has been doubted. Stephen Foster differently insisted that Eaton died before 1631. See
Graebner, “Protestants and Dissenters,” 140n3.

\(^{113}\) Timothy George, “John Gill,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George
rather than Brine. See Edward Trivett, *The Baptists Vindicated from Some Groundless and False Charges*
justification is the immanent act of God from eternity. This new idea moved the doctrine of active justification into the service of hyper-Calvinism, a development that deserves close scrutiny.

In order to buttress their claim that justification is the immanent act of God from eternity, the English Baptists employed a hyper-Calvinist concept of active justification that was neither sound nor appropriate, a usage that can reasonably be labeled a misuse or even abuse. We will discover Brine’s doctrine of justification in his debate with Robert Bragge (1665-1738), but first we need to rectify a common misunderstanding of hyper-Calvinism.

3.4.3.1. A Brief Background of Hyper-Calvinism

A full exploration of the complex world of English Baptists and their connection to hyper-Calvinism is beyond the scope of this study, so this section will merely summarize what seems to be the broad scholarly consensus of the place of English Baptists in the

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114 Robert Bragge, a son of Robert Bragge (d.1704), was mostly called “Mr. Bragge of London” (Brine also calls Bragge like this). Bragge served as the minister of the Independent church in Paved Alley, Lime Street. Bragge finished his degree at Utrecht in 1685. See A. G. Matthews, ed., Calamy Revised. Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 70; T. S. James, The History of the Litigation and Legislation Respecting Presbyterian Chapels and Charities in England and Ireland Between 1816 and 1849 (London, 1867), 707. Bragge is the different person with the same name, Robert Bragge (1627-1704) who has been known as a funeral preacher of Thomas Wadsworth and Ralph Venning. Cf. Robert Bragge, A Cry For Labourers in Gods Harvest: Being a Sermon Preached Upon the Sad Occasion of the Late Funeral of that Eminent Servant of Christ, Mr. Ralph Venning (London, 1674); idem, The Life and Death of the Godly Man: Exemplified in a Sermon Preached (London, 1677).
history of hyper-Calvinism. Rather than the thorough, fivefold definition provided by James Garrett (supralapsarianism, the *pactum salutis*, justification from eternity, no general offer of grace, and antinomianism\(^{115}\)) we can use the more concise treatment of the English Baptists’ denial of “duty-faith” and “duty-repentance” and the resulting rejection of a “universal call” of the Gospel to unregenerate sinners as evidenced in the writings of Curt Daniel, Iain Murray, and David Engelsma.\(^{116}\) Lewis Wayman (d.1764) and Brine answered the “Modern Question” in the negative, representing English Baptists who rejected the heretofore accepted understanding that reprobates who hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ are then obliged to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ.\(^{117}\) Once this became the consensus among English Baptists, scholars began to define them as hyper-Calvinists.\(^{118}\) More comprehensive definitions of hyper-Calvinism such as Garrett’s assume that there are positive links between hyper-Calvinism and the doctrines

\(^{115}\) Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 89.

\(^{116}\) Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill,” 746-767; Iain H. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 47; Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, 11. Curt Daniel’s definition of hyper-Calvinism is useful: “Hyper-Calvinism is that school of Supralapsarian ‘Five Point’ Calvinism which so stresses the sovereignty of God by over-emphasizing the secret over the revealed will and eternity over time, that it minimizes the responsibility of Man, notably with respect to the denial of the word ‘offer’ in relation to the preaching of the Gospel of a finished and limited atonement, thus undermining the universal duty of sinners to believe savingly with the assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ died for them . . .” See Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill,” 767.

\(^{117}\) In 1737, the Rothwell Independent minister, Matthias Maurice, published a pamphlet, *A Modern Question Modestly Answered*. Maurice’s question is whether repentance and faith are the duty of unconverted sinners to believe in Christ, and his answer is “God does by His Word plainly and plentifully make it the duty of unbelievers to believe in Christ.” See Matthias Maurice, *A Modern Question Modestly Answered* (London, 1737), 3-4, 22. Brine dismisses this duty-faith and duty-repentance as “Arminian tenets.” See John Brine, *A Refutation of Arminian Principles* (London, 1743). Brine’s *Refutation* is the specific answer to the writing which is anonymously written by Abraham Taylor, a London Congregational minister and theological tutor. See Abraham Taylor, *The Modern Question Concerning Repentance and Faith* (London, 1742).

of the *pactum salutis*, supralapsarianism,\(^{119}\) justification from eternity, and antinomianism,\(^{120}\) but with these links Garrett runs the risk of overgeneralizing.

It appears that not all English Baptists of the eighteenth century can be definitely labeled hyper-Calvinists; even John Gill (1697-1771) is not a clear-cut candidate.\(^{121}\)

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\(^{119}\) David Engelsma, for example, claims that neither supralapsarianism, nor emphasizing God’s sovereignty inevitably yields hyper-Calvinism. (*Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, 10). It is certain that those who hold the supralapsarian view such as Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Jerome Zanchius (1516-1590), William Ames (1576-1633), Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641), etc. cannot be naturally classified as hyper-Calvinist. Not only that, Herman Witsius (1636-1708), David Dickson (1583-1662), Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), Owen, Goodwin, etc. who concretely develop the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* also cannot be charged as hyper-Calvinist.

\(^{120}\) Wardlaw makes a link between eternal justification and antinomianism, designating the doctrine of eternal justification as a “foolish dogma” which is held by many Antinomians. See Wardlaw, *Systematic Theology*, 188-189. Curt D. Daniel observes the common misunderstanding on the relationship between eternal justification and antinomianism: “Many writers have described or defined Hyper-Calvinism or Antinomianism in terms of the doctrine of eternal justification.” See Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill,” 305.

Since we could not come to a firm decision regarding Gill, we chose the Particular Baptist minister John Brine (1703-1765) as our representative of the type. With few exceptions scholars consider Brine to be one of the purest advocates of hyper-Calvinism. Brine’s “no” to the “Modern Question” stems from his confusing active justification with justification from eternity, as well as his failure to distinguish the logical from the temporal.

3.4.3.2. A Case Study in Hyper-Calvinistic Justification: John Brine

Brine set forth his position in his work *A Defence of Eternal Justification* (1732, hereafter, *A Defence*), which was a polemic response to Robert Bragge’s *A Plain Scriptural Account* (1732). Brine said that his purpose in writing *A Defence* was to

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**Century** (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1869), 499-500. Muller comments that the identification of Gill’s thought as “hyper-Calvinistic” is, at best, less than helpful. For labelling someone as a “hyper-Calvinist,” which is assessing their theology by appeals to or comparisons to only Calvin, the entire theological branding tends to neglect the breadth of the Reformed tradition. See Richard A. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation* (New York: Brill, 1997), 52. Thus, labelling someone as a “hyper-Calvinist” who is an English Baptist of the eighteenth century is not a simple task. Specifically in Gill’s case, it was much more complicated, for there were interpretative differences about whether Gill accepted or rejected the “essence” of hyper-Calvinism (viz., concerning duty-repentance, duty-faith, the general offer of grace, etc.). According to Nettles, Gill does not offer a specific answer about the Modern Question unlike Brine. See Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 30. Yet, Engelsma points out that Gill denies the duty-faith and duty-repentance like Brine and Wayman. See Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, 11.


Robert Bragge, “A Plain Scriptural Account of a Sinner’s Justification Before God,” in *A Defence of Some Important Doctrines of the Gospel, in Twenty-Six Sermons. Most of Which Were Preached*
defend the theological and biblical validity of the doctrine of justification from eternity, which “has been lately objected to by Mr. Bragge.”  

Brine added, “As I have reason to believe Justification from Eternity to be a Scriptural doctrine, I think myself under obligation to appear in its defence [sic].” To advocate the idea of eternal justification against Bragge, Brine aggressively uses the notion of active justification. In connecting active justification to eternal justification he appeals to Maccovius’ Πρῶτα Παρέρμηνες.

Brine states, “When Christ, as a surety, engaged for the elect, they were justified. ‘At the same time [that] Christ became a surety for us, and our sins were imputed to him, we were absolved from guilt, and reputed just; that is actively justified:’ Which was from everlasting, or before the foundation of the world” (emphasis added). Unfortunately Brine’s appeal to Maccovius was a mistake. As Bavinck points out, Maccovius does not place justification in eternity but contends that justification took place after the Fall (therefore, in time) when the first promise (Gen 3:15) was given.

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126 Brine, A Defence, 3.

127 Brine, A Defence, 4.


129 “Quo tempore Christus factus est vas pro nobis, & peccata nostra ipsi imputata sunt, eo nos sumus absoluti areatu, & reputati justi; hoc est, active justificati . . .” See Johannes Maccovius, “Πρῶτα Παρέρμηνες, sev prima falsa adversarium, puta, Pontificiorum, Socinianorum, Lutheranorum, Arminianorum, Anabaptistarum,” in Joannes Maccovius redivivus: seu manuscripta ejus typis exscripta, ed. Nicolaus Arnoldi (Franeker, 1654), 120 (Armin., ch.10).

130 Brine, A Defence, 16-17.

131 Bavinck states: “Maccovius expressly rejected and opposed it [eternal justification]. He does accept that justification in an active sense occurred for all the elect in what is called the “maternal promise,” Genesis 3:15, and finds proof for this in the phrase “before the ages” (Titus 1:2), which does not refer to eternity but to ages of long ago. He, accordingly, treats the benefits in the following order: active justification, regeneration, faith, passive justification, good works; but he nevertheless continues to distinguish justification from its decree in eternity.” See Bavinck, GD, 3:589 (§48.430); RD, 3:583.
In order to connect active justification to eternal justification, Brine tries to graft the eternal characteristic of justification onto that of election, arguing, “If there is a personal election from eternity, there also may be a personal Justification from eternity,” because “the elect were by God considered and viewed in Christ from everlasting.” Brine’s critic Bragge thinks that Brine mistakes election and predestination (decree in eternity) with justification (execution in time), supposing that actual justification is terminated in election or in God’s predestination from eternity.

Maccovius’ own words: “We have to know that of all the deeds of God that aim for our salvation, predestination is the only immanent act in God. All other deeds of God, like justification, sanctification, adoption and redemption (which approximately includes the foregoing deeds) are reckoned to be transient acts. For these acts, together and separate, produce something, whether this be in a physical way or in a moral way, as in those which are justified, adopted and redeemed. It is common in the schools on the other side to state that predestination does not produce anything in him who is predestined” (Praeclare hoc probat Wottonus Anglus, de Reconcil. part.1. 1.1. c.3. num.12. Sciemendum est, inquit, praedestinationem ex iis omnibus Dei actionibus, quae ad nostrum salutem pertinent, actionem in Deo esse immanentem. Reliquas autem omnes Dei actiones, cujusmodi sunt, Justificatio, Sanctificatio, Adoptio, & quae has fere universas complectitur, Redemptio, in transeuntibus actionibus numerari. Nam hae quidem omnes & singulae ponunt aliud, vel physice, vel moraliter saltem in Justificatis, Adoptatis, Redemptis. De praedestinatione autem tritum est in Scholis, eam nihil ponere in praedestinato). See Maccovius, Collegia, 129-130 (from Beeke and Jones, “Thomas Goodwin and Johannes Maccovius,” 143-144, 144n72). Cf. Van den Brink, “Johannes Maccovius.” Yet, Henk van den Belt does not doubt that Maccovius holds the concept of eternal justification. See Henk van den Belt, “Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace: A Shift in Emphasis Towards the Internal Work of the Spirit,” Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology 29, no. 1 (March 2011): 43–44.

132 Brine, A Defence, 38. See also Brine, A Defence, 34, 44, 51. At least at this moment, Gill and Brine both are of the same mind: “Justification is by many divines distinguished into active and passive. Active justification is the act of God; it is God that justifies. Passive justification is the act of God, terminating on the conscience of a believer, commonly called a transient act, passing upon an external object. It is not of this I shall now treat, but of the former; which is an act internal and eternal, taken up in the divine mind from eternity, and is an immanent, abiding one in it” (emphasis added). See John Gill, A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or, a System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures (London, 1796), 298.

133 Brine, A Defence, 15.

134 In the framework of “decree in eternity and its execution in time,” Burgess expresses his concern with regard to the idea of justification from eternity: “[T]his [eternal justification] is to confound the decree of God, and its execution. . . . it is a dangerous thing.” See Burgess, The True Doctrine of Justification, 16, 99, 116. Heppe also clarifies that “the decree of justification is one thing, justification itself is another.” See Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, 557. On this, see also Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 682-685; Berkhof, ST, 517-519b; Buchanan, The Doctrine of Justification, 158-161. Burgess also clarifies: “We must not therefore apprehend of God, as having a new will to do a thing in time, which he has not from eternity (as Vorstius and others blaspheme) but his will was from all eternity, that such a thing
This is similar to the error Bavinck warns against, i.e., considering the *logical* distinction between active and passive justification as a *temporal* order.\textsuperscript{135}

Like Eaton, Brine’s perspective on faith denies its instrumental causality and minimizes its role in justification. Brine fully agrees with Richard Baxter’s *Aphorismes*: “[F]aith is not the instrumental cause. In this I am entirely of Mr. Baxter’s opinion, who reasons thus: ‘If faith be an instrument, it is the instrument of God or man; not of man, for man is not the principal efficient, he doth not justify himself; not of God, for it is not God that believeth.’”\textsuperscript{136} Brine believes that if one is justified by faith as an instrumental cause, faith finally “has a causal influence on our Justification,”\textsuperscript{137} and as a result, the causal significance of Christ’s obedience and suffering for justification will be relatively weakened and faint.\textsuperscript{138} Justification by faith is “only the comfortable *knowledge* or *perception* of that gracious privilege” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{139} For Brine, faith is only the perception that the elect are already justified in eternity.\textsuperscript{140} In this scheme, faith does not have any influence on being justified. Thus, in Brine’s argument passive justification *sola* be in time accomplished by his wisdom.” See Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification*, 167. He further adds: “[O]nly predestination is an immanent act of God, and all the rest, justification, regeneration, glorification, are transient acts; for predestination thought it be an act of God choosing such an one to happiness, yet it doth not work any real change or positive effect in a man, unless we understand it virtually, for it is the cause of all those transient actions that are wrought in time.” See Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification*, 168.


\textsuperscript{137} Brine, *A Defence*, 18.

\textsuperscript{138} Brine, *A Defence*, 18.

\textsuperscript{139} Brine, *A Defence*, 12.

\textsuperscript{140} Thus, Brine’s argument is quite similar to Eaton’s view on faith except explicitly placing justification in eternity. Cf. Eaton, *The Honey-Combe*, 280.
fide is significantly overshadowed if not effectively replaced by an eternal active justification.

With a strong fear of Arminianism in his background, Brine minimizes the role of faith in justification. For him passive justification sola fide must be repudiated and faith no longer plays a significant role in justification.

3.4.3.3. Brine’s “Justification from Eternity” Is Not Active Justification

Unlike Eaton, Brine is well aware of the distinction between active and passive justification. Although Brine’s doctrine of justification, which keeps this distinction in mind, appears to be more organized and better formulated than Eaton’s, the outcome is essentially the same. Both men endorse the idea of justification preceding faith. However, for Brine justification is the immanent act of God from eternity; he therefore identifies active justification as justification from eternity and even as God’s decree. Eaton does not make this connection. His overall position is ambiguous while in comparison Brine’s is relatively clear. From the perspective of Reformed orthodoxy as summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Brine is in error. His hyper-Calvinism nullifies all that happens in the temporal realm, removes the important significance of justifying faith, and destroys Reformed orthodoxy’s carefully tuned equilibrium between active and

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142 According to WCF 11.4: “God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.” (Emphasis added; Schaff, ed., “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 627).
passive justification.

3.5. The Four Parallel Characteristics of Active Justification and Definitive Sanctification

With the previous study as a foundation, active justification can be characterized in four ways. First, active justification is *inseparable* from passive justification. Active justification means that sinners are first justified objectively *in foro Dei*. Passive justification means that then and only then are sinners justified by faith as an instrumental cause *in foro conscientiae*. Without active justification passive justification loses its object and collapses; active justification is the pillar on which passive justification stands. Antinomian and hyper-Calvinistic ideas of justification fail to acknowledge this indivisibility; they stress only the dimension of active justification while neglecting the essential aspect of passive justification. One potential outcome of ignoring the inseparability of active and passive justification is antinomianism. A second outcome would be the danger of placing the two dimensions in a temporal rather than a logical framework, leading to the erroneous conception of justification from eternity.

Second, active justification is “objective” and “decisive,” i.e., it has a “determinacy.” On the basis of active justification, passive justification is actualized, not vice versa. The determinacy of active justification does not mean that justification is terminated in active justification; the terms “determinacy” and “termination” are different. While the former refers to the condition of being confirmed or settled, the latter refers to the act of concluding or closing. Justification does not terminate in active justification; if it did, passive justification would be meaningless. Rather, justification is
first determined in active justification and then terminated in passive justification. Thus, active justification is distinguished (but still inseparable) from passive or completed justification. Justification is completed in passive justification *sola fide*, not in active justification *soli Dei*.

Third, active justification is *Christ-centered*. Active justification *soli Dei* provides the “object” of belief to which passive justification *sola fide* attaches and on which it rests. The object is Christ’s righteousness and its imputation unto sinners. Sinners are declared righteous when they believe what active justification offers. Thus, active justification says that passive justification *sola fide* does not happen by faith *per se* or in the act of believing, nor is it brought about by mere evangelical obedience. Rather, active justification gives passive justification *sola fide* its true meaning when the believer trusts in Christ’s meritorious obedience and satisfaction.

Fourth, active justification fundamentally establishes *God’s absolute sovereignty* over justification. When active justification is properly understood and presented as working in concert with passive justification, misguided attempts to overemphasize God’s sovereignty in justification (e.g., the antinomian or hyper-Calvinistic teachings of justification) cannot stand. The concept of active justification answers two crucial questions, i.e., who is the ultimate author *sola Dei* of passive justification *sola fide*, and in what does the sinner need to believe in order to be justified. The correct answers always reinforce God’s sovereignty in salvation.

These same four core characteristics of active justification—i.e., inseparability, determinacy, Christ-centeredness, and total reliance on God’s sovereignty in justification—are found in parallel in definitive sanctification as seen in Chapter 2.
Definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification are inseparable and indivisible. The believer’s union with Christ envisages a holiness that is a *fait accompli*; definitive sanctification is the condition of sharing Christ’s perfect holiness in the mystical union with Christ. Definitive sanctification simply defines who the primary agent is—the Holy Spirit—and where sanctification begins—with God. Both active justification and definitive sanctification proclaim our salvation to be *God-driven*.

3.6. Summary

This chapter champions the importance and meaningfulness of active justification by presenting its proper definition, key ideas, and biblical and historical foundations in a theological context. The chapter shows some of the ways that active justification has suffered from misunderstanding, neglect, and misuse, all of which have arisen in theological debates within the church over the past several centuries. We saw that failing to properly define and distinguish active from passive justification and to keep them in balance with each other plays a major role in all three types of error.

Active justification is God’s divine act to justify sinners on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness, an act that takes place objectively *in foro Dei*. Genesis 3:15, which describes the *protoevangelium* and the Christ-centered divine promise, supports what active justification essentially stands for. This verse introduces the notion, inculcated in the idea of active justification, namely that God divinely commits and promises to justify sinners on the basis of Christ’s righteousness. Romans 8:30a (“those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called he also justified”) and Romans
3:24a (“they are now justified by his grace as a gift”) refer to the objective, decisive, and free nature of justification on which the notion of active justification stands.

The distinction between active and passive justification has often been used to preclude antinomian, neonomian, Arminian, and hyper-Calvinist theologians alike from seeing justification exclusively one way or the other. Anti-Arminian John Eaton neglects the proper distinction of active/passive justification; as a result, he inadvertently opens the door to the antinomian perspective in the sense that passive justification is ignored and underestimated in an extreme overemphasis on the aspect of active justification. Hyper-Calvinist John Brine misuses the idea of active justification by equating it with God’s immanent act from eternity. And more recently Lane Tipton misunderstands active justification, claiming that it undermines the Reformation’s doctrine of justification *sola fide*. However, active justification does not undermine the truth of justification *sola fide*; rather it provides the object of belief for justification *sola fide*. Furthermore, in recognizing that active and passive justification are inseparable and that believers’ justification is realized not in active justification but in passive justification *sola fide*, Tipton’s criticism becomes untenable. His criticism arises out of a misunderstanding of the core characteristics of active justification.
PART II

THE FOUR PARALLEL CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTIVE JUSTIFICATION AND DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION
CHAPTER 4
PARALLEL CHARACTERISTIC NO. 1:
INSEPARABILITY IN HERMAN Bavinck

The Dutch Reformed tradition is a rich venue in which to explore the idea and nature of active/passive justification and definitive/progressive sanctification. More than in any other theological tradition, Dutch Reformed theologians discuss this matter in a thoughtful, well-ordered way.\(^1\) Although the idea of definitive sanctification has been more fully developed since Murray, Dutch Reformed theologians prior to Murray also touched on the analogous idea of definitive sanctification in their writings.\(^2\) Even so, when they discuss active justification and the similar idea of definitive sanctification, Dutch Reformed theologians do not approach it in perfect theological harmony. A diversity of thought can be seen across the work of Bavinck, Comrie, Witsius, and Kuyper.

Part II defines four parallel characteristics to explore how Dutch Reformed theologians dealt with both active justification and definitive sanctification:

(1) \textit{Inseparability} — The two-dimensional structure and indivisible nature of justification (active/passive) and sanctification (definitive/progressive) as shown in Bavinck

\(^{1}\) In comparison to antinomian tradition in the 1630-40s and hyper-Calvinistic tradition in the early 1700s, the argument with regard to active justification in Dutch Reformed theology, specifically in the early 1900s when Bavinck’s first and second edition of \textit{Gereformeerde dogmatiek} (1895-1901, 1906-1911, respectively) was published, is more concretely developed. The reasons are: (1) all issues are historically well researched; (2) different theological opinions in a debate between the \textit{Afscheiding} churches and the \textit{Doleantie} churches settle into shape to some degree at Utrecht 1905; and (3) even those who go off the rails to a certain degree are still in Reformed tradition in the large picture.

\(^{2}\) Cf. Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” 184-188.
(present chapter);

(2) *Objectivity and Decisiveness* in justification and sanctification as presented in Comrie (chapter 5);

(3) *Christ-centeredness* in justification and sanctification in the light of Christ’s meritorious and satisfactory work as found in Witsius (chapter 6);

(4) *God’s sovereignty in salvation* with the accent on God’s power as seen in Kuyper (chapter 7).

By examining all four characteristics in parallel, the soteriological meaning and significance of active justification and definitive sanctification will be fully revealed (chapter 8).

4.1. Bavinck and the *via media*

Throughout his lifetime, Bavinck tried to stand in two theological places at once in an *eclectic* manner, e.g., between pietism and modernism, Kampen and Leiden, faith and science, confessional/biblical theology and scientific/academic discipline, the *Afscheiding* (or Secession) and the *Doleantie* (or the Grieving) tradition, etc. Bavinck never

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5 The *Afscheiding* (or Secession) is an ecclesiastical movement that tried to reform within the State Reformed Church (*De Hervormde Kerk*) but came to exist as a separate denomination apart from it. The *Afscheiding* wanted to hold authoritative confessional church (affirming the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort) and reassert biblical authority against liberal critics. The
completely rejects the modern scientific learning from Leiden under the teaching of Johannes Scholten (1811-1885) and Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891), nor does he totally rebuff the spirit of the Doleantie church where Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) stood. By adhering to confessional/biblical theology, by no means does Bavinck exclude the scientific/academic discipline that was the intellectual mainstream of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Bavinck is always a man of his era, not uncritical or passively receptive but methodical and judicious. Taking this into account, a re-evaluation of Bavinck’s academic and theological style has been conducted by scholars who now see

_Doleantie_ (or the Grieving) is a second Secession that ousted from the State Reformed Church after failing to bring reform during the mid-1880s. See James D. Bratt, _Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture_ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Hendrik Bouma, _Secession, Doleantie, and Union, 1834-1892_ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 79-98; J. Mark Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” _Mid-America Journal of Theology_ 19 (2008): 13-16.


7 Van den Belt, “Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace,” 54-59; Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” 13-17.

him as a moderate or eclectic thinker rather than an insular or clannish Fundamentalist, as an attentive and careful rather than antibiblical or modernized Scholastic. Bavinck’s moderate tendency, however, does not mean he lacks a theological backbone, or holds an inclusivism that tolerates any viewpoint without critical thinking. Bavinck’s ultimate standard when following the *via media* is the Scriptures and a confessional/orthodox Reformed theology. For Bavinck, any theological and intellectual thought that is not in accordance with these standards should be carefully scrutinized and criticized, just like that of the theology of his teachers, Scholten and Kuenen. Yet even with his opponents Bavinck does not set aside academic courtesy; rather, he finds a positive way to dialogue in an effort to find biblical truth. For example, when Bavinck became deeply concerned about Kuyper’s idea of presumptive or immediate regeneration he published a total of

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10 Bolt, “The Bavinck Recipe for Theological Cake,” 12. In a review on *Herman Bavinck als Dogmaticus* (see R. H. Bremmer, *Herman Bavinck als dogmaticus* (Kampen: Kok, 1961)), Cornelius Van Til regards scholasticism as a problematic intellectual thought that not only places a human authority over the divine authority, but also weakens the primacy of the Word and Christ. Van Til then argues that this kind of scholastic tendency can be found in Bavinck’s theology. Although Van Til criticizes Bremmer’s excessive criticism of Bavinck, Van Til still sees the limitation of Bavinck at least in terms of holding scholastic tendency which can be said to be “modern activism.” See Cornelius Van Til, “Herman Bavinck as a Theologian,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1961): 48-64. Here, Van Til seems to regard the term “scholasticism” as a particular theological or philosophical content, not as a method. Cf. van Asselt et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 1-9.

11 On the careful investigation with regard to the sources that Bavinck usually uses, see Van den Belt, “Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace”; idem, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 267-273.


13 Van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture*, 250.

14 Since the subject of regeneration controversy lies beyond the topic of this study, it will not be dealt with in detail. Explained briefly, the idea of presumptive or presupposed regeneration (*onderstelde...*)
forty articles between 29 March 1901 and 2 May 1901 in the periodical De Bazuin (The Trumpet) in opposition to Kuyper’s view. In the process Bavinck did not assume an aggressive position toward Kuyper; on the contrary, as Beach and Van den Belt acknowledge, Bavinck’s anti-Kuyperian argument is mild and respectful.

Bavinck’s aim was to hold to the via media in order to retain the “unity” of the GKN church between the so-called “A” churches (Afscheiding) and “B” churches (Doleantie). As Harinck points out, Bavinck preferred synthesis to antithesis, eclectic compromise to strict dualism, and moderation to extremism. This characteristic of Bavinck’s theological methodology, attitude, and spirituality, as Berkouwer defines it, can

wedergeboorte), which is often associated with Abraham Kuyper, refers to the notion that a principal ground for administering infant baptism is that parents may presuppose their regeneration on the strength of God’s promise. The dispute regarding immediate (or unmediated) regeneration is focused on whether the use of means (e.g., the Word and sacraments) is needed (mediate regeneration) or not (immediate or unmediated regeneration) when being regenerate in performing God’s saving and sovereign work. As appeared in the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905 which was primarily formulated by Bavinck, Kuyper’s view is challenged. For example, Acts, Article 158 declares: “According to the confession of our churches, the seed of the covenant, by virtue of the promise of God, is to be considered regenerated and sanctified in Christ, until the contrary should become evident from their doctrine and conduct as they grow up.” See Acta der generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, gehouden te Utrecht van 22 Augustus tot 7 September 1905 (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1905), 84-85.


16 Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” 12, 15; Van den Belt, “Herman Bavinck and His Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace,” 54. Bavinck’s respectful attitude with Christian virtues is a valuable manner for those who are in a sharp theological debate with opponents. For instance, Augustine is also one who tried to react to his opponents with Christian virtues. In the context of anti-Donatists, Augustine endeavored to convey Christian “love” to Donatists who were lacking to love in their arguments and behaviors. On this, see Jae-Eun Park, “Lacking Love or Conveying Love? The Fundamental Roots of the Donatists and Augustine’s Nuanced Treatment of Them,” Reformed Theological Review 72, no. 2 (August 2013): 103-121.

17 The GKN church refers to the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland). These churches were founded in 1892 in a merger of two distinct reformatory groups within the Dutch State Reformed Church (De Hervormde Kerk), namely, the Afscheiding of 1834 and the Doleantie of 1886.

be expressed in a single word: *catholicity* (*Katholiciteit*).\(^1^9\) Under the spirit of catholicity, the so-called “Two Bavincks” hypothesis, which tries to place Bavinck in an incompatible bipolar mode (e.g., Reformed and theological churchman vs. modern and progressive academic), cannot be upheld.\(^2^0\) The spirit of catholicity, as Bolt well describes, ultimately makes Bavinck a person who developed a faithfully religious dogmatic theology by using the academic method and a precise scholastic distinction eclectically.\(^2^1\)

Bavinck’s method of *via media* in the spirit of catholicity leaves its unmistakable mark throughout his theological writings.\(^2^2\) Bavinck’s moderate tendencies come into plain view in particular when he gives his view of the topic of this paper, i.e., justification and sanctification. Bavinck always deals with justification and sanctification, not as an

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21 Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 267-269. Beeke also states: Bavinck “concluded with his own position, which was often a synthesis of other viewpoints arrived at through painstaking scriptural exegesis and reasoning . . . Bavinck habitually sought to incorporate elements of truth that he found in other theological systems.” See Joel R. Beeke, “The Atonement in Herman Bavinck’s Theology,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles H. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 324-345. In his dissertation, Hielema also notes: “Bavinck’s use of the notion of duality is consistent with his theological method, which is one of seeking for the balanced middle ground while avoiding extremes. This manner is apparent in his clear rejection of monism and dualism in favour of duality.” See Sydney Jacob Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption” (PhD diss., Wycliffe College, 1998), 74.

oversimplified single structure, but as a comprehensive, twofold, *inseparable* structure.

The reason Bavinck does this is to pay close attention to Scripture in order to avoid falling into any of the radical arguments that have plagued the church throughout its history, and to make a synthesis (rather than a mere antithesis) based on a sound biblical and orthodox perspective.

4.2. Bavinck’s Soteriological Views

4.2.1. Bavinck and Definitive Sanctification

As well described by scholars, Bavinck was not only an excellent dogmatician, but also an exceptional ethicist. Bavinck wrote his dissertation on ethics, *De ethiek van Ulrich Zwingli* (*The Ethics of Ulrich Zwingli*), and prepared numerous writings on the subject. Before being recognized for his theology and dogmatics, Bavinck had been renowned for pedagogy, ethics, and educational philosophy. As an ethicist-

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dogmatician, Bavinck placed great emphasis on sanctification in his soteriology, stating that “since the redemption that God grants and works out in Christ is meant to accomplish complete deliverance from sin and all its consequences, it includes sanctification and glorification from the very beginning.”

Despite its doctrinal importance, Bavinck’s views on sanctification have scarcely been acknowledged in the scholarly field. In particular, the detailed examination of the relationship between Bavinck’s view of sanctification and the idea of definitive sanctification has been almost completely ignored; this neglect cries out for academic redress. Bavinck speaks of

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29 Most works that are directly studied for Bavinck’s view of sanctification do not care much about examining the relationship between Bavinck’s perspective on sanctification and definitive sanctification. For example, in his dissertation Gleason treats Bavinck’s view of sanctification under the theme of the *unio mystica*, but does not deal with it in light of definitive sanctification. See Ronald N. Gleason, “The Centrality of the *Unio Mystica* in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001), 162-188. Ortend’s essay focuses only on the dimension of progressive sanctification in Bavinck and Berkouwer’s work. See Dane Ortend, “Sanctification by Justification: The Forgotten Insight of Bavinck and Berkouwer on Progressive Sanctification,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 43-61. Even though Bolt’s writings are essentially about sanctification, their foci are fundamentally toward Bavinck’s ethics under the theme of the *imitatio Christi*. See Bolt, *A Theological Analysis*; idem, “Christ and the Law in the Ethics of Herman Bavinck.” Similarly to Bolt, Van Keulen’s essay examines Bavinck’s view of sanctification in the theme of the *imitatio Christi*, but he further discusses Bavinck’s distinction of passive/active sanctification. See Van Keulen, “Herman Bavinck on the Imitation of Christ,” passim. Snoeberger tries to find the seed of definitive sanctification in Dutch Reformed theology (specifically, Kuyper, Bavinck, and Berkouwer). Yet, his treatment focuses on examining the causality language between justification and definitive
sanctification as a twofold structure with a Trinitarian perspective. His view of sanctification is not only conceptually similar to the idea of definitive sanctification, but also endorses the inseparability between passive sanctification (for Bavinck, an aspect of definitive sanctification) and active (or progressive) sanctification. This issue will be closely examined in the following three sections: (1) evangelical and legal sanctification; (2) active and passive sanctification; and (3) the Trinitarian perspective on sanctification.

4.2.1.1. Evangelical Sanctification and Legal Sanctification

In his doctrine of sanctification Bavinck presents an idea that is almost identical to definitive sanctification. In Magnalia Dei, Bavinck resolves sanctification into two aspects: legalistic and evangelical. According to Bavinck, in legalistic sanctification (wettische heiligmaking) “the believers proceed to sanctify themselves . . . by means of sanctification in the ordo salutis. See Snoeberger, “Definitive Sanctification,” passim. Recently, Eglinton investigates Bavinck’s view of sanctification in the dialectical structure, i.e., objective/subjective, passive/active, gift/task, etc., but does not make a close connection to the idea of definitive sanctification. See Eglinton, “On Bavinck’s Theology of Sanctification—as-Ethics.”


31 Herman Bavinck, Magnalia Dei: onderwijzing in de christelijke religie naar gereformeerde belijdenis (Kampen: Kok, 1909). Bavinck’s Magnalia Dei (1909) has been translated into English by Henry Zylstra in 1956 titled Our Reasonable Faith. Zylstra’s preface says: “Our Reasonable Faith is less technical, less exclusively professional, more popularly intended than the Reformed Dogmatics, and is more fully supported by Scriptural reference and annotation, but it is, like the lager work, a book of basic Christian dogma.” Hereafter Magnalia Dei will be cited as MD. When quoted from the Dutch text, original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages. Subsequent quotations of Magnalia Dei will be mostly taken from Zylstra’s translation Our Reasonable Faith (hereafter ORF), but if necessary, the translation will be modified in consultation with the original Dutch text. For a distinction of evangelical/legalistic sanctification in GD, see also Bavinck, GD, 4:233 (§58.480); RD, 4:248.
their exertion and good works.”

Evangelical sanctification (evangelische heiligmaking) as revealed by God in the Gospel is “not only completely prepared by Christ but by His Spirit is also applied to our hearts and worked out there.”

Through this distinction Bavinck affirms that even though in the “legal” sense sanctification is performed by human agency, in the “evangelical” sense the ultimate author and performer of sanctification is God in communion with Christ through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Bavinck clarifies it thus: “[I]t were truer to say that effort of the believers in working towards their own sanctification is made possible only by the fact that it is a work of God which He fulfills in them” (emphasis added).

Bavinck’s emphasis on God’s ultimate sovereignty and sole performance in sanctification directly supports his theological motto “grace restores nature.”

“Certainly, grace, so far from obliterating nature, restores it. Inasmuch as man because of sin lacked the desire and the ability to walk in the ways of the Lord, he by virtue of the re-creation is again inclined and equipped, at least in principle, to live uprightly not

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32 Bavinck, MD, 544; ORF, 479.

33 Bavinck, MD, 544; ORF, 479.

34 Bavinck, MD, 543; ORF, 478. “Veeleer is de arbeid der geloovigen aan hunne eigene heiligmaking alleen daardoor mogelijk, wijl zij een werk Gods is, dat Hij in hen volbrengt.”

merely in some but in all the commandments of God.”

Although human nature per se is devoid of the ability to be holy due to sin, this does not mean that sanctification is therefore completely unattainable. Rather, according to Bavinck, solely through (or as a sole result of) God’s work to renew human nature, sanctification is both accessible and applicable. That is, grace restores nature in the realm of sanctification. In terms of setting the initial point of sanctification solely on God and His grace, definitive sanctification and evangelical sanctification both stand on the same foundation.

As explained in Chapter 2, the definition of definitive sanctification can be expressed using four terms: decisiveness, identity, condition, and ground. That is, in the scheme of definitive sanctification, believers are objectively and definitively sanctified apart from their own works when they are united with Christ (objectivity and decisiveness, 1 Cor 6:11) and as a result, they are called saints (identity, 1 Cor 1:2). Those who are definitively sanctified are in a state of being conformed and sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness through mystical fellowship with Christ (condition, 1 Thess 4:4, 7; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 2:9). Definitive sanctification is the foundation of a progressive sanctification that once begun takes an entire lifetime to complete (ground, John 17:17; 1 Thess 5:23; Phil 1:6). As shall be seen, Bavinck’s view of evangelical sanctification matches these four characteristics.

First, Bavinck perceives the aspects of “objectivity” and “determinacy” that denote the meaning of sanctification. Bavinck notes:

He [Christ] already was in communion with them [believers] and was their

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36 Bavinck, MD, 543; ORF, 478.

37 Cf. Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” 277-284. See also chapter 2 of this study.
guarantor and mediator. And the whole church, comprehended in him as its head, has objectively been crucified, has died, been resurrected, and glorified with him. All the benefits of grace therefore lie prepared and ready for the church in the person of Christ. *All is finished* [determinacy]: God has been reconciled; nothing remains to be added from the side of humans. Atonement, forgiveness, justification, the mystical union, sanctification, glorification, and so on—they do not come into being after and as a result of faith but are objectively, actively present *in Christ* [objectivity] [emphasis added].

For Bavinck, sanctification therefore has a point that is objectively and definitively accomplished in Christ. Bavinck further adds: “[T]he High Priest has sanctified Himself for His people, in order that they too should be sanctified in truth (John 17:19), the believers also immediately receive the name of holy ones or saints.” Yet Bavinck makes clear that being named as a saint does not guarantee a sinless state; rather, it means that the believer “becomes the *property* of the Lord, inasmuch as it has been sanctified in Christ and become a temple of the Holy Spirit” (emphasis added). Believers being identified as saints reveals the fact of their change in “lordship” from Satan to Christ. The evangelical sanctification that Bavinck earnestly promotes describes the same fact that is inherent in definitive sanctification. Bavinck speaks so clearly of the dimensions of “decisiveness” and “objectivity” in sanctification in order to emphasize and affirm that “objectively and subjectively, from beginning to end, the work of salvation is a work of God’s grace and of his grace alone.” That is, the entire process of salvation *(ordo* 

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39 Bavinck, *MD*, 542; *ORF*, 477. Here, Bavinck provides relevant biblical texts, Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2.

40 Bavinck, *MD*, 542; *ORF*, 477. See also John 17:19; 1 Cor 1:30; 3:16; 6:11, 19 that Bavinck provides.

salutis) is “his [God’s] work. He is the active agent” (emphasis in the original).42 This idea erases self-endeavor as a means to gain holiness through self-righteousness or in a “consistently nomistic way,” which Bavinck exhorts believers to avoid.43

Second, Bavinck infers his concept of the “identity” of God’s chosen people from several biblical references. He states that in evangelical sanctification, believers are “described as ‘saints,’ because by being called saints (cf. Rom. 1:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; “called to be saints”), they stand in a special relationship with God and, taking the place of the old Israel, they are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (1 Pet. 2:9).”44 According to Bavinck, believers are saints because they “were elected in Christ from before the foundation of the world . . . they have been sanctified by the one sacrifice of Christ [emphasis added].”45 In this regard, the identity of God’s chosen people is fundamentally rooted in eternal election and Christ’s sacrificial work. For Bavinck the sole reason and way for believers to receive the identity as saints is by having “impacted [Christ’s] full holiness and glory to us.”46 Therefore the identity of a believer as a saint cannot be altered or shaken in its integrity by anything or anyone because it is solidly grounded in the conviction that Christ “is a complete and all-sufficient Savior. He does not accomplish his work halfway but saves us really and

42 Bavinck, GD, 3:520 (§47.419); RD, 3:524.

43 Bavinck, GD, 4:215 (§52.477); RD, 4:233.

44 Bavinck, GD, 4:237 (§58.481); RD, 4:252. For the detailed exegesis on 1 Cor 1:2, see section 2.3.1.2 of this study.

45 Bavinck, MD, 571; ORF, 502.

46 Bavinck, GD, 4:232 (§58.480); RD, 4:248.
completely.” Unlike legal sanctification, evangelical sanctification speaks authoritatively of the identity believers fundamentally have. Bavinck notes:

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. For it consists in the reality that in Christ God grants us, along with righteousness, also complete holiness, and does not just impute it but also inwardly imparts it by the regenerating and renewing working of the Holy Spirit until we have been fully conformed to the image of his Son. 

Through mystical union with Christ, not through their own meritorious works, believers have complete righteousness and holiness from Christ imputed to them and are henceforward called saints. Defining this identity is crucial for Bavinck, for the necessity and duty of performing progressive sanctification can be found in this identity such that “the believers must become that which they are [holy] [emphasis added].”

Third, having given the notion of definitive sanctification as indicative of the “condition” of being conformed to and sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness through mystical union with Christ, Bavinck expresses it this way:

[B]y their baptism [believers] have also been brought into fellowship with Christ . . . they have been transferred into a state of holiness (1 Thess. 4:4, 7; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:9) and were therefore washed and sanctified (1 Cor. 6:11), are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16), with whom they were marked with a seal for the day of redemption (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), made new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10), children of God not only by adoption but also by regeneration (John 1:12-13; 1 John 1:3), saints (Rom. 1:7; etc.) and sanctified (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14). Sanctification, accordingly, is in the first place a work of God (John 17:17; 1 Thess. 5:23; Phil. 1:6), more specifically of Christ and his Spirit” [emphasis added].

47 Bavinck, GD, 4:232 (§58.480); RD, 4:248.

48 Bavinck, GD, 4:233 (§58.480); RD, 4:248.

49 Bavinck, MD, 571; ORF, 502.

50 Bavinck, GD, 4:218 (§52.477); RD, 4:235.
Unlike legal sanctification, evangelical sanctification signifies the “new state” (*nieuwe stand*) of believers that is brought about only through mystical fellowship with Christ.\(^{51}\) According to Bavinck, the difference between legal and evangelical sanctification does not lie in the content of the law *per se*, but on the “*mode of sharing it* [the law] [emphasis added].” That is, those who are in a “new state” with Christ do not keep the law by their own efforts and self-righteousness. Instead, in Christ God gives them “the perfect sanctification along with the justification, and He gives this as an internal possession through the regenerating and renewing operation of the Holy Spirit” (emphasis added).\(^{52}\)

So the way to abide in the law for those who are in this “new state” is not through self-endeavor, but through the power of “perfect sanctification” that God gives them in Christ. Still, Bavinck warns that perfect sanctification as a mode of retaining the new state does not imply perfectionism in any sense.\(^{53}\) Even though believers in evangelical sanctification are in a new state by union with Christ, they are still “called to purify themselves from all pollution of flesh and spirit, to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 7:1), to crucify the flesh with all its passions and desires.”\(^{54}\)

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\(^{52}\) Bavinck, *MD*, 541; *ORF*, 476.

\(^{53}\) Bavinck, *GD*, 4:218 (§52.477); *RD*, 4:235. “Zij zijn wel in het vlees en hebben voortdurend te strijden tegen het vlees, 1 Cor. 3:1; Gal. 5:17—Paulus zelf heeft de volmaaktheid nog niet bereikt, Phil. 3:12, en verwacht deze eerst met de verlossing van het lichaam van deze dood, Rom. 7:24; 8:23 . . .”

\(^{54}\) Bavinck, *GD*, 4:218 (§52.477); *RD*, 4:235.
“consists fully in believers being conformed to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:19).”55

Fourth, in the same way that others use the term definitive sanctification as the foundation for progressive sanctification, Bavinck uses the term evangelical sanctification as the foundation for it. Bavinck points out that “God does not inject the righteousness and holiness of Christ into us mechanically . . . but He works it out in us in an organic way” (emphasis added).56 The organic approach appears in Scripture thus: “[T]he kingdom of heaven is a gift of God (Luke 12:32) and yet it is a treasure of great worth which must be sought after (Matt. 6:33 and 13:46)” (emphasis added). That is, believers “have put on the new man, and must nevertheless constantly put him on (Eph. 4:24 and Col. 3:10).”57 One might think that evangelical sanctification with its once-for-all nature and progressive sanctification with its ongoing nature are incompatible, but Bavinck responds to this by pointing out that these two ideas “do not conflict. The one is simply the ground [grondslag] and guarantee [waarborg, i.e., warranty] of the other” (emphasis added).58 Thus Bavinck can conclude, “The believers can and they will become holy because in Christ they are holy [emphasis added].”59

In sum, the idea of evangelical sanctification that Bavinck proposes bears a striking resemblance to definitive sanctification as defined in chapter 2. Both ideas

55 Bavinck, GD, 4:237 (§52.481); RD, 4:253.
56 Bavinck, MD, 571; ORF, 502.
57 Bavinck, MD, 571; ORF, 502.
58 Bavinck, MD, 571; ORF, 502.
59 Bavinck, MD, 571; ORF, 503.
establish to the fullest extent God’s sovereignty in the realm of sanctification, remind us
of the ultimate identity of believers, confirm that the condition in which believers
fundamentally exist is the mystical union with Christ, and provide the foundation on
which progressive sanctification rests and performs.

4.2.1.2. Passive Sanctification and Active Sanctification

For Bavinck, evangelical sanctification, while focusing more on God’s sovereignty than
human participation in salvation, still does not entirely neglect the dimension of human
responsibility in sanctification. To avoid an unbalanced presentation of God’s
sovereignty and human responsibility, Bavinck proposes both ideas of sanctification,
passive and active sanctification. Unlike the distinction of active/passive justification that
is viewed from God’s side, Bavinck’s distinction of passive/active sanctification is
observed from the human side. That is, passive sanctification is a “gift” that is awarded
by God; therefore believers who receive this gift are passively sanctified solely by God’s
grace (John 17:17; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20-21). This makes “evangelical”
sanctification “passive” sanctification. Believers are passively sanctified.

Sanctification, however, “is not exhausted by what is done for and in
believers . . . in the first place it is a work and gift of God . . . but in the second place, an
active meaning, and people themselves are called and equipped to sanctify themselves
and devote their whole life to God (Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12:14; and

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so forth)” (emphasis added). Thus according to Bavinck this progressive dimension is active sanctification. Believers have to actively sanctify themselves. Bavinck contrasts active sanctification with “continued repentance” from the Heidelberg Catechism, stating that “continued repentance . . . is the negative side of the process that stands out, in active sanctification it is the positive side that comes to the fore.” Yet Bavinck thinks that those who are passively sanctified in the sense of evangelical sanctification are simultaneously “active in both and can be active because, by regeneration at the outset and by positive sanctification later on, believers receive the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Although Bavinck’s concept of passive justification apparently includes the idea of definitive sanctification as the initial translation from death to life by God’s grace, his passive justification extends its meaning even as far as glorification. In addition, Bavinck’s idea of passive justification extends to God’s continuing and all-encompassing work in making believers holy. This extended range of passive justification can best be understood in the logical inseparability between passive and active sanctification as seen below.

Bavinck acknowledges that passive (evangelical) and active (progressive) sanctification are inseparable and indivisible, for “Scripture always holds on to both

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62 HC (Q/A.88): “Q: What is the true repentance or conversion of man? A: It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.”


facets: God’s all-encompassing activity and our responsibility.” Bavinck expresses this inseparability in a well-balanced exposition:

Just as in the preaching of the gospel, faith is a gift of God and yet people are responsible for their attitude toward God (e.g., Rom. 9:1-29 and 9:30-10:21), so here the possession of all the benefits of the covenant (forgiveness, adoption, life, salvation) is secured before any kind of work, yet over and over and with great urgency there is an insistence on good works as if those benefits can only be obtained by these works. The kingdom of God is a gift granted by God according to his good pleasure (Matt. 11:26; 16:17; 22:14; 24:22; Luke 10:20; 12:32; 22:29), yet it is also a reward, a treasure in heaven, which has to be aggressively sought and gained by labor in the service of God (Matt. 5:12, 20; 6:20; 19:21; 20:1ff; and so forth). Believers are branches in the vine who cannot do anything apart from Christ, yet at the same time they are admonished to remain in him, in his word, in his love (John 15). . . . They are saints and sanctified in Christ Jesus, and must nevertheless become holy in all their conduct (1 Pet. 1:15; 2 Pet. 3:11), pursuing and perfecting their sanctification in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:3), for without it no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

Just as with definitive and progressive sanctification, for Bavinck passive and active sanctification are two dimensions of the same reality (“holiness”); neither of these can be excluded or neglected. Bavinck believes that “Scripture definitely insists on sanctification, both its passive and active aspects, and proclaims both the one and the other with equal emphasis.” Bavinck further adds, “It sees no contradiction or conflict between them but rather knits them together as tightly as possible as when it says that, precisely because God works in them both to will and to do, believers must work out


66 Bavinck, GD, 4:238-239 (§58.481); RD, 4:253-254.

67 Bavinck, GD, 4:240 (§58.481); RD, 4:255. “Zo sprekende, hadden zij ongetwijfeld de Schrift op hun hand. Want deze houdt ons de heiligmaking voor, beide van haar passieve en actieve zijde, en predikt de ene zowel als de andere met dezelfde nadruk.”
their own salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12-13).”68 From this viewpoint, sanctification “both from the divine and the human side, is an organic process” (emphasis added).69

4.2.1.3. Trinitarian Perspective on Sanctification

The preceding chapter showed that when Murray elaborates on the idea of definitive sanctification, he tends to underscore the theme of “union with Christ” to a considerable degree. Murray’s theme was the way that definitive sanctification is realized in believers. However, Bavinck’s discussion looks at sanctification from a more comprehensive Trinitarian perspective that recognizes God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit equally.

Bavinck argues convincingly that the beginning point of sanctification has to be God.70 Just as with forgiveness of sin, sanctification is also God’s work and His gift.71 The two benefits of God’s grace, i.e., justification and sanctification, are “distinct from each other,” yet “[not] for a moment separated.”72 Bavinck clearly believes that this

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68 Bavinck, GD, 4:240 ($58.481); RD, 4:255.


70 Bavinck, GD, 3:486-487 ($48.410); RD, 3:494.


72 Bavinck, GD, 4:233 ($52.480); RD, 4:249. Bavinck adds: “The acts of God performed in justification and sanctification are inseparably connected. Those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom. 8:30). Justification brings life in its train (5:18).” See Bavinck, GD, 4:233 ($52.480); RD, 4:249. Cf. Bavinck, MD, 539; ORF, 474; Calvin, Institutes, 3.3.19; 3.16.1.
*duplex beneficium* “rests on the fact that God is both righteous and holy.”⁷³ God is therefore the initiator and *causa efficiens* of sanctification.

God sanctifies believers through mystical union with Christ.⁷⁴ According to Bavinck this union is neither a pantheistic “substantial mingling” as mysticism interprets it, nor a mere agreement in disposition, will, and purpose as Ritschl and rationalism maintain.⁷⁵ Rather, union with Christ “starts already in the pact of redemption (*pactum salutis*). The incarnation and satisfaction presuppose that Christ is the head and mediator of the covenant.”⁷⁶ As Scripture expresses it, the mystical union is that “Christ lives and dwells in believers (John 14:23; 17:23, 26; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17), and that they exist in him (John 15:1-7; Rom. 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:10ff).”⁷⁷ Since Christ is “our sanctification in the same sense that He is our righteousness,”⁷⁸ believers are sanctified as soon as they enter into mystical fellowship with Him. In justification, Christ is “granted to us juridically, in sanctification, ethically; by the former we become the righteousness of God in him; by the latter he himself comes to dwell in us by his Spirit and renews us after his image.”⁷⁹ Therefore Christ is the *causa formalis* and guarantor, and mystical union with him the *causa materia* and

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⁷⁸ Bavinck, *MD*, 537; *ORF*, 473.

⁷⁹ Bavinck, *GD*, 4:234 (§52.480); *RD*, 4:249.
medium of sanctification.

However, this union is “not immediate but comes into being by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the connection between justification and sanctification is also firmly grounded in the Spirit.” According to Bavinck, God “actualizes this application of salvation [ordo salutis] by the Holy Spirit” (emphasis added). Bavinck says that the biblical evidence proves it is the Holy Spirit “who regenerates them [believers] (John 3:5-6, 8; Titus 3:5); gives life to them (Rom. 8:10); incorporates them into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 6:15, 17, 19); brings them to faith (2:9ff; 12:3); washes, sanctifies, and justifies them (6:11; 12:13; Titus 3:4); leads them (Rom. 8:14) . . . In a word, the Holy Spirit dwells in them and they live and walk in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1, 4, 9-11; 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 4:6; and so forth).” Thus Bavinck affirms that believers are “being ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus’ (1 Cor. 1:2); and Jesus sanctifies his people by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11), who as such is now called the Holy Spirit and is the prime agent [or principle, het principe] of sanctification” (emphasis added). The Holy Spirit is therefore the prime executor of applicatio salutis, the motive of power and our spiritual companion throughout the whole journey of sanctification.

For Bavinck, sanctification is neither the independent work of God nor of Christ alone, but a harmonious and concordant act in which they associate with each other and

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80 Bavinck, GD, 4:235 ($52.480); RD, 4:251.
81 Bavinck, GD, 3:492 ($48.411); RD, 3:498.
82 Bavinck, GD, 4:236 ($52.480); RD, 4:251.
83 Bavinck, GD, 4:237 ($52.481); RD, 4:252. “. . . de gelovigen zijn ἡγιασμένοι ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 1 Cor. 1:2; en deze heiligt zijn volk door de Heilige Geest, ἐν πνεύματι, 1 Cor. 6:11, die nu als zodanig πνεύμα ἅγιον heet en het principe van de heiliging is.”
with the Holy Spirit in one Holy Trinity. Bavinck clearly believes that the Trinitarian perspective reflects the fullest expression of what Scripture says about sanctification’s principle and biblical base.

In sum, Bavinck sees both passive (definitive) and active (progressive) dimensions in sanctification. Even further, evangelical sanctification resembles quite closely the idea of definitive sanctification. Reluctant to lean too much toward either dimension while at the same time avoiding contentious debate, Bavinck relies on synthesis rather than antithesis. Passive and active sanctification cannot be separated; the two are always bound together; the twofold expression of sanctification is realized and actualized in and through the Trinity.

4.2.2. Bavinck and Active Justification

The study of Bavinck’s doctrine of justification has not progressed to a thorough review of his interpretation of the distinction between active and passive justification.\(^{84}\) though

\(^{84}\) Even though the distinction of active/passive justification plays an important role in Bavinck’s doctrine of justification as shall be seen onward, nobody has satisfactorily dealt with it in detail. For example, in his dissertation, Gleason only focuses on the theme of “justification sola fide” and the “unio mystica” in chapter 5 where he talks about Bavinck’s view of justification. See Gleason, “The Centrality of the Unio Mystica in the Theology of Herman Bavinck,” 147-161. On Gleason’s brief exposition of Bavinck’s view of justification in light of his life, see Gleason, Herman Bavinck, 192-194, 202, 262-264, 340-341. Bolt briefly mentions Bavinck’s scholastic distinction of active/passive justification in a general sketch of Bavinck’s theological method. See Bolt, “The Bavinck Recipe for Theological Cake,” 12. Eglinton also briefly introduces the idea of active and passive justification when expounding on Bavinck’s dialectical argument of sanctification. See Eglinton, “On Bavinck’s Theology of Sanctification-as-Ethics,” 183. Ortlund extensively discusses Bavinck’s doctrine of justification in eleven theses, but not mentioning the distinction of active/passive justification. See Dane Ortlund, “‘A Benefit No Mind Can Fully Comprehend’: Bavinck’s Doctrine of Justification,” Calvin Theological Journal 46, no. 2 (November 2011): 249-267. In analyzing the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905, Beach deals with Bavinck’s doctrine of justification, but it only focuses on the doctrine of eternal justification in the debatable context with Kuyper. See Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” 21-24, 55-59. On Bavinck’s position toward the idea of justification from eternity, see Beeke, “The Atonement in Herman Bavinck’s Theology,” 332; Alvin L. Baker, Berkouwer’s Doctrine of Election: Balance or
he himself addresses this distinction in a fairly substantial manner. Just as in his discussion of sanctification, Bavinck deals with justification in a twofold sense, i.e., active and passive justification. He does not arrive at this distinction from his own arbitrary speculations. Instead Bavinck finds it in the biblical voice, from church history, and as a clear theological necessity. Compared to theologians before and after Bavinck who looked into the distinction between active and passive justification (see previous chapter), Bavinck’s discussion is well-developed and expansive. Bavinck’s arguments regarding this distinction will be explored in six sections: (1) theological reaction; (2) judicial decision (objective) and actual possession (subjective); (3) active justification as acquisition and passive justification as application; (4) active versus eternal justification; (5) the relationship of active justification to faith; and (6) significance of the distinction between active and passive justification. We will also see the “inseparability” of active and passive justification as a parallel characteristic of definitive and progressive sanctification.

4.2.2.1. Theological Reaction

According to Bavinck, for Reformed theologians the raison d’être for the distinction...
between active and passive justification is to escape from two erroneous theological positions, i.e., nomism and antinomianism. Bavinck sees that each error throws the doctrine of justification out of balance. Nomism diminishes or neglects the dimension of active justification by giving faith, experience, and conversion through human agency too prominent place in the sphere of justification. On the other hand, as seen in Eaton’s argument the antinomians rely completely on God’s absolute sovereignty as revealed in the dimension of active justification. Bavinck acknowledges that with the rise of nomism and antinomianism, “active justification retained its own important place.” Against the nomistic belief that the ground of justification has shifted “from God to the human agent, from Christ’s righteousness to the activities of faith, from the gospel to the law,” the distinction and inseparability of active from passive justification move the center of gravity toward God who is the ultimate consummator of justification. Against the antinomian precept that overlooks the subjective aspect of justification by wrongly overemphasizing the dimension of objective justification, the distinction and inseparability of active and passive justification move the center of gravity of justification back toward the human who by faith is the secondary agent of justification. Choosing synthesis over antithesis as his theological method, Bavinck uses the distinction

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88 On the detailed argument regarding the problem of nomism, see Bavinck, *GD*, 4:168-177 (§51.469); *RD*, 4:186-199.

89 On this, see section 3.4.2.2 of this study.


between active and passive justification as the theological tool to correct both the nomistic and antinomian errors.

4.2.2.2. Judicial Decision (Objective) and Actual Possession (Subjective)

In *Magnalia Dei*, Bavinck does not use the precise terminology “active” or “passive” justification but explains these dimensions using the terms “objective” and “subjective.”

Before giving a detailed definition of these terms, Bavinck first explains why justification is urgently necessary for sinful humans. He notes that “all men without exception are guilty of transgressing the law of God, and are deserving of the punishment which He has appointed for such transgression.” Since “all are born unclean; all are all gone aside, and there is none that does good, no, not one,” but they are “not the ones who must bring it [justification] into being,” therefore, the perfect righteousness that is required must “come from outside ourselves in Christ Jesus.” In light of this, several times Bavinck emphasizes the mechanism of justification, i.e., “the righteousness which justifies us is a righteousness of God through faith in Christ; neither in whole nor in part is it dependent upon our works but is in its entirety perfect and adequate, a gift of God, the free gift of grace.”

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93 Bavinck, *MD*, 500; *ORF*, 441.

94 Bavinck, *MD*, 501; *ORF*, 442.

95 Bavinck, *MD*, 515; *ORF*, 454.

96 Bavinck, *MD*, 515; *ORF*, 453-454. Bavinck provides the relevant biblical passages in the footnote such as Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:9; and Tit. 3:5.
According to Bavinck, justification contains two dimensions: the legal or judicial decision and its actual possession. There is a causal relationship in these: “We can get possession of it [justification] by judicial decision, and we can, on the basis of such a court ruling, sooner or later take possession of it” (emphasis added).97 That is, the legal declaration forms the foundation for realizing actual possession, not vice versa. Bavinck recognizes that even though the legal right and the actual possession “coincide,” there nevertheless remain large differences between the two. First, “property is the legal, possession the actual.” Second, human beings first “must have a right to something in order to possess it and use it.”98 Applying this principle to the subject of justification, believers cannot legally possess righteousness without the forensic declaration and approval of God. According to Bavinck, the legal verdict is “objective justification;” its actual possession is “subjective justification.” Bavinck adds:

In a sense the justification of the sinner has already taken place in the counsel of election. It is objectively pronounced in the resurrection of Christ who was delivered up for our sins and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25), and in the gospel which proclaims the glad tidings that in the death of Christ God stands in a relationship of reconciliation and peace to the world (2 Cor. 5:19). And subjectively this justification comes to man in the internal calling and is on his own part, accepted in faith [emphasis added].99

Here again, Bavinck does not explicitly use the terms active and passive justification, but what he says is precisely the distinction of active/passive justification as spelled out in Gereformeerde dogmatiek (to be seen later).100 Although justification has two

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97 Bavinck, MD, 516; ORF, 455.

98 Bavinck, MD, 517; ORF, 455.


100 The reason why Bavinck does not employ this distinction in the discussion of justification in Magnalia Dei—though he does in Gereformeerde Dogmatiek—might be assumed from Nicholas Steffens’
dimensions, they are by no means separated because they are “one link [ééne schalm] in the chain of salvation” (emphasis added). That is, Bavinck believes that “justification in the tribunal of God, accordingly, comes to expression in time through faith in the consciousness of man.” Thus Bavinck holds that objective justification is actualized and terminated in the sphere of subjective justification, and the two dimensions are never disconnected or detached from each other; they are “coupled with simultaneity in time.”

4.2.2.3. Active Justification as Acquisition and Passive Justification as Application

Bavinck defines the idea of active and passive justification as follows:

Active justification already in a sense occurred in the proclamation of the gospel, in the external calling, but it occurs especially in the internal calling when God by his word and Spirit effectually calls sinners, convicts them of sin, drives them out toward Christ, and prompts them to find forgiveness and life in him. Logically this active justification precedes faith. It is, as it were, the effectual

book review on Magnalia Dei. Steffens writes: “His book, being a popularized system of Reformed doctrine, appears in an humble dress. None but a learned man could have written this book, but he has hidden his tools. He gives us the results but not the process of his work. Although the author has laid aside his scientific armor, he speaks to his readers in a scholarly manner.” See Nicholas M. Steffens, “Review of Magnalia Dei by Herman Bavinck,” The Princeton Theological Review 8 (1910): 508.

101 Bavinck, MD, 521; ORF, 459.

102 Bavinck, MD, 521; ORF, 459.

103 à Brakel also maintains that the relationship between active justification and passive justification is inseparable: “[t] Is een en dezelfde daad; ’t onderscheid is alleen in het opzicht, hoe ze gedaan, of hoe ze ontvangen wordt; dus kan men ze niet van elkaar scheiden; waar de actieve is, daar is ook de passieve, en wederom waar de passieve is, daar is ook de actieve [These are one and the same act. The difference pertains only to the manner in which it is performed or how it is received. One therefore also cannot separate them. Wherever there is active justification there will also be passive justification, and vice versa, wherever there is passive justification there will also be active justification].” See à Brakel, De redelijke godsdienst, XXXIV.III.1; The Christian’s Reasonable Service, 2:376.

104 Bavinck, GD, 4:203 (§51.475); RD, 4:219. “[E]r is hier een prioritas ordinis, doch een simultaneitas temporis.”
proclamation of God’s Spirit that one’s sins are forgiven, so that persons are persuaded in their hearts, believingly accept—dare to accept and are able to accept—that word of God and receive Christ along with all his benefits. And when these persons, after first, as it were, going out to Christ (the direct act of faith), then (by a reflex act of faith) return to themselves and acknowledge with childlike gratitude that their sins too have been personally forgiven, then, in that moment, the passive justification occurs by which God acquits believers in their conscience and by his Spirit bears witness with their own spirits that they are children of God and heirs of eternal life.\textsuperscript{105}

In this way active justification is objective. It occurs solely through the benefit from Christ’s satisfactory death and resurrection and is completely apart from the human agent; therefore, it logically precedes subjective faith. Passive justification is subjective. It occurs in the conscience of believers who by faith believe what active justification has wrought. “This objective and active justification,” according to Bavinck, “was made known in the gospel from Genesis 3:15 on and in the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 4:25).”\textsuperscript{106} The ultimate defeat of the power of Satan by Christ\textsuperscript{107} and the resultant effect of His victory constitute the very content of objective and active justification. Bavinck further explains active justification as “the righteousness of God in terms of which he acquits believers is objectively revealed in the gospel, apart from the works of the law and before faith (Rom. 1:17; 3:21), as is also the reconciliation that God brought about in

\textsuperscript{105} Bavinck, GD, 4:203 (§51.475); RD, 4:219.

\textsuperscript{106} Bavinck, GD, 3:589 (§48.430); RD, 3:583. Bavinck expatiates, while using Maccovius, that Gen 3:15 is the “maternal promise” that pledges to occur justification for all the elect in an active sense. Cf. Maccovius, Collegia, 423; idem, Loci communes theologici (Amsterdam, 1658), 676. For the relationship between Gen 3:15 and justification, see also Abraham Kuyper and Gijsbert Voetius, Voetius’ catechisatie over den Heidelberghschen Catechismus (Rotterdam: Gebroeders Huge, 1891), 585 (XXIII.59).

Christ between himself and the world (2 Cor. 5:19).”¹⁰⁸ So Bavinck says that active justification is rooted in union with Christ and in the imputation of Christ’s righteousness unto sinners,¹⁰⁹ explaining the meaning of active justification, “when they [sinners] were given to Christ and was given to them, when their sin was imputed to Christ and his righteousness was imputed to them.”¹¹⁰ For Bavinck, active justification is the acquisition (verwerving) of redemption, and passive justification is the application


¹⁰⁹ The recent theological voices that regard the traditional doctrine of imputation as an unsatisfactory idea and un-Pauline language among a diverse range of evangelical Pauline scholars have raised a theological concern among proponents of the doctrine. For example, Gundry states that “in biblical theological quarters its second half [of double imputation], the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers, is losing support—with good scriptural reasons and possibly with a good theological benefit.” See Gundry, “The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” 17. Carson’s response to Gundry’s argument, 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. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 46-78. Mark Seifrid also questions about the biblical-theological credibility of the traditional doctrine of imputation. See Mark A. Seifrid, “Luther, Melanchthon, and Paul on the Question of Imputation,” in Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates, eds. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 137-152. Against John Piper, N. T. Wright also has complaints that “the ‘imputed righteousness’ of Christ . . . is on the one hand a legitimate thing to talk about from a systematic theological standpoint, but is on the other hand not actually found stated as such anywhere in Paul.” See N. T. Wright, Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision (Downers Grove; IVP Academic, 2009), 46. For Piper’s understanding on the notion of imputation, see John Piper, The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007); idem, Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness? (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002). However, as Eddy, Beilby, and Enderlein appropriately point out, even though the term imputation per se may be missing in Pauline texts as opponents insist, the concept is substantially implied in a number of Pauline texts (e.g., Rom 4:3-8; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). See Paul R. Eddy, James K. Beilby, and Steven E. Enderlein, “Justification in Contemporary Debate,” in Justification: Five Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 76.

¹¹⁰ Bavinck, GD, 3:589 (§48.430); RD, 3:583. Bavinck adds elsewhere that since believers’ guilt is imputed to Christ, Christ may be called a sinner as Luther and Calvin do. However, it is meant only in the objective sense, as Paul puts, that Christ was made to be sin and became a curse (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Isa 53:12). “[T]he apostle was not asserting that Christ was a sinner and an accused person in himself but that he was regarded and treated by God as a person who was guilty of violating the law and had called the curse down upon himself. Self-accusation, regret, remorse, and confessing one’s personal sins could therefore not occur in Christ’s case; nor was he subject to spiritual death, to the inability to do any good and the inclination to all evil . . . . The ‘substitution of persons,’ which took place between Christ and his own, must not be understood in a pantheistic-physical or mystical sense but bears a legal character: Christ voluntarily entered into the same relation to the law and its demands in which we stood as a result of our transgression” (emphasis added). See Bavinck, GD, 3:390 (§46.390); RD, 3:400.
(toepassing) of redemption. Through Christ’s suffering and death, believers “acquired the astonishing blessing that all his benefits, hence also the forgiveness of sins would be applied personally and individually to all his own” (emphasis added). Thus Bavinck argues that “the acquisition [active justification] necessarily entails the application [passive justification].” “[T]he acquisition and the application are so tightly connected that the former cannot be conceived or exist apart from the latter and vice versa.” Yet even this organic interrelationship follows the rule of priority. If active justification which acquires the righteousness of Christ is understood as a “gift” objectively granted by God, and passive justification is its “acceptance” by faith, then “the objective act of donation is prior to the subjective act of acceptance.” In this sense, Bavinck’s argument follows Wyttenbach’s where active is the first and passive the second justification.

4.2.2.4. Active Versus Eternal Justification

Bavinck’s view of active justification provides sound theological direction for dealing with two common misunderstandings: (1) confusing the meaning of active justification

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111 Bavinck, GD, 4:202 (§51.475); RD, 4:218.

112 Bavinck, GD, 4:202 (§51.475); RD, 4:218. “De verwerving brengt noodzakelijk de toepassing mee.”

113 Bavinck, GD, 4:202 (§51.475); RD, 4:218.


115 Cf. Wyttenbach, Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae methodo scientifica pertractatae, 2:2.9.1146 (p. 939).
with justification from eternity, and (2) seeing active and passive justification as a temporal rather than a logical order. Bavinck’s solution for dealing with these misunderstandings is founded on recognizing the logical and inseparable relationship between active and passive justification. Bavinck chooses the more traditional view of active justification, holding that any attempt to define it as eternal justification is a theological mistake. In his opinion, the error occurs in thinking that the distinction between active and passive justification is a temporal rather than logical order. For Bavinck, justification did not occur in eternity in the dimension of active justification, but was realized and terminated in time in the dimension of passive justification, through the logical pairing of active with passive justification. Bavinck notes, “active justification first occurred only in the internal calling before and until faith [thus, not in eternity], but the intimation of it in human consciousness (in other words, passive justification) came into being only through and from within faith.” Bavinck does see “precious truth” (kostelijke waarheid) in the idea of justification from eternity since not only election but also the pactum salutis, the atonement of the Mediator, is from eternity. Nevertheless,

116 Thus, contra Brine’s argument. See section 3.4.3.2 of this study.

117 “Men moet nl. wel overwegen, dat de genoemde onderscheiding een logische, doch geen temporale betekenis heert.” See Bavinck, GD, 4:203 (§51.475); RD, 4:219. Price makes the same mistake to equate active justification with eternal justification. According to Price, Bavinck’s view of active justification, which appears in RD, 4:202, is “that which takes place ‘from eternity, in the resurrection of Christ, in the gospel, before and after the gift of faith, but sums up everything in a single concept.’” See Price, “John Calvin and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Justification in Relation to Ethics,” 147. However, it is not what Bavinck means about active justification; for Bavinck continually warns that the distinction of active/passive justification is a logical distinction. Price also tends to regard the idea of justification from eternity as an indispensable building block to form antinomianism. See Price, “John Calvin and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Justification in Relation to Ethics,” 148. Yet, this is not always to be as examined in section 3.4.2.1 of this study.

118 Bavinck, GD, 4:185 (§51.471); RD, 4:203.

119 “Want de verkiezing is van eeuwigheid; het pactum salutis, dat de borgtocht van de Middelaar
Bavinck eventually realized the theological error in the idea of justification from eternity when he finally understood that it violates the established theological principle of a “decree in eternity and its execution in time.” Bavinck states, “[A]lthough this justification of the sinner, this acquittal, is based solely on the righteousness which is in Christ [who appointed from eternity], it does in time through faith become operative in the consciousness of man and effects important change there.” Bavinck further adds:

If one says that justification, as an immanent act in God, necessarily has to be eternal, indeed identical with the God who justifies, one must bear in mind that in that sense everything—including the creation, incarnation, satisfaction, calling and regeneration—is eternal, and that one who for that reason began to speak of eternal creation, and so forth, would give rise to much misunderstanding. . . . Now this interpretation in fact comes down completely to the common distinction between the decree and its execution. The counsel of God and all the decrees summed up in it are undoubtedly eternal ‘immanent acts,’ but the works of God ad extra—creation, providence, government, redemption, justification, and so forth—are in the nature of the case acts that pass from one condition to another (actus transientes). As works they do not belong to the order of reason (ratio ordinis) but to the order of execution (executio ordinis).

Bavinck thinks that even though the decree to justify occurs in God’s eternal immanent act, its execution is God’s work ad extra that occurs in time. That is, the eternal decree

voor de zijnen insluit, is van eeuwigheid.” See Bavinck, GD, 4:199 (§51.475); RD, 4:216. Here, Bavinck quotes Kuyper’s Het werk van den Heiligen Geest, 2:222ff.


121 Bavinck, MD, 521; ORF, 458-459.

122 Bavinck, GD, 4:200 (§51.475); RD, 4:216.

123 Similarly, Turretin also states: “[A]lthough we do not deny that our justification was decreed even from eternity (as nothing takes place in time which was not constituted by him from eternity), still we do not think (speaking accurately) justification itself can be called eternal. The decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another—as the will to save and sanctify is one thing; salvation and sanctification itself another. The will or decree to justify certain persons is indeed eternal and precedes faith itself, but
of justification is one thing, and justification itself another. If these two are indistinguishable, the distinction between God’s work \textit{ad intra} and God’s work \textit{ad extra} are obscured. The result would be a series of odd conclusions, e.g., eternal creation, eternal incarnation, eternal redemption, etc. As Bavinck properly points out, the idea of eternal justification and the distinction between active and passive justification have fundamentally different natures in terms of their method of dividing the aspects of justification. Eternal justification and its counterpart, time-based justification, have a temporal distinction while active/passive justification have a logical distinction. Bavinck concludes that the distinction between active and passive justification “has \textit{no temporal significance}” (emphasis added). Since there is no common ground between the ideas of eternal justification and active justification, Bavinck believes that they cannot coexist.

4.2.2.5. The Relationship of Active Justification to Faith

Before discussing the relationship of faith specifically to active justification, Bavinck first

\begin{quote}
actual justification takes place in time and follows faith.” See Turretin, \textit{Institutes of Elenctic Theology}, 2:683 (9.9.3).
\end{quote}


127 “Zo nam men dan gemeenlijk aan, dat, indien er al met enig goed recht van een rechtvaardiging in het besluit van God, in de opstanding van Christus, in het Evangelie gesproken kon worden, de justificatio activa toch eerst plaats had in de vocatio interna, vóór en tot het geloof.” See Bavinck, \textit{GD}, 4:185 (§51.471); \textit{RD}, 4:203.
had to investigate the role of faith generally in the realm of justification. He saw that faith “has only the role of a receiving agency, like that of the hand which accepts something; by it the soul places its dependence solely in Christ and His righteousness.”

Even though justification *sola fide* is an incontestable biblical truth, Bavinck still keeps strict watch over any attempt to regard faith as the ground for justification as nominians were wont to do. Bavinck maintains that justification *sola fide* must be understood as justification ἐκ πίστεως (through faith, Rom 1:17) or διὰ πίστεως (through faith, Rom 3:22) or πίστει (by faith, Rom 3:28), but never διὰ πίστιν (on account of faith). For Bavinck, faith “does not justify by its own essence or act because it itself is righteousness, but by its content, because it is faith in Christ, who is our righteousness” (emphasis added). Bavinck emphasizes that faith *per se* neither has any ability nor should it ever be considered the basis of justification. For “if our faith, which is often little and weak and hidden under an overlay of doubt and fear, is the ground for our justification, the Christian life is a life of continual fear [*voortdurende angst*] and uncertainty [*onzekerheid*].” Thus, the content, i.e., the object of faith should be Jesus

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131 Bavinck, *GD*, 4:193 (*§51.473*); *RD*, 4:211. Bavinck similarly states elsewhere, “[F]aith justifies because in Christ it comes to share in a righteousness which is just as perfect and adequate as that which is demanded by the law but which God through grace by way of the gospel now grants in Christ (Phil. 3:9). It justifies not by its own intrinsic moral worth but by its content, namely, the righteousness of Christ.” See Bavinck, *MD*, 523; *ORF*, 461.

Christ “who has been presented by God as a propitiation through the power of His blood (Rom. 3:25), who has borne the curse for us (Gal. 3:13), who was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), who died, was raised, and is seated at the right hand of God as our intercessor (Rom. 8:34), who is made righteousness unto us (1 Cor. 1:30), and in whom we are made the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).”¹³³ That is, justification does not occur as a result of or by faith per se, but with a view to faith,¹³⁴ that is counted or reckoned as righteousness to the believer solely by virtue of Christ’s satisfaction and righteousness as the content or object of faith (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3, 5, 6, 22; Gal 3:6).¹³⁵

For Bavinck the fact that active justification logically precedes faith is not problematic.¹³⁶ Still, Bavinck foresees that the idea of active justification might be questioned because it is not justification “from” (uit) or “by” (door) faith, as Scripture regularly puts it, but “to” (tot) faith.¹³⁷ The objection is that active justification which precedes faith is not supported by Scripture which affirms only justification sola fide.¹³⁸

¹³³ Bavinck, MD, 524; ORF, 460-461. Cf. HC (Q&A 61): “Why do you say that you are righteous only by faith? Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, for only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God. I can receive this righteousness and make it my own by faith only.”

¹³⁴ “[D]e rechtvaardigmaking met andere woorden geschiedde niet uit of door, maar tot het geloof.” See Bavinck, GD, 3:589 (§48.430); RD, 3:583.

¹³⁵ Bavinck, MD, 522; ORF, 460. Bavinck similarly notes elsewhere: “Along the righteousness that God granted in Christ and on the basis of which he justified Christ as mediator of the covenant for all his own in his resurrection, there is no room for a justification consisting in faith or love. If there were, the latter would nullify the former.” See Bavinck, GD, 4:194 (§51.473); RD, 4:211.

¹³⁶ “Deze actieve rechtvaardigmaking gaat dan in logische orde aan het geloof vooraf.” See Bavinck, GD, 4:203 (§51.475); RD, 4:219. Thus, pace Tipton’s argument. See section 3.4.1.2 of this study.

¹³⁷ “Tegen deze onderscheiding wordt van nomistische zijde de bedenking ingebracht, dat de justificatio activa dan niet is een rechtvaardigmaking uit en door, gelijk de Schrift zich steeds uitdrukt, maar tot het geloof.” See Bavinck, GD, 4:203 (§51.475); RD, 4:219.

¹³⁸ This objection is similar to Tipton’s complaint about the idea of active justification. Cf. Tipton, “Biblical Theology,” 8-10.
However, Bavinck finds that such an objection, “can be readily refuted.”139 For “[w]hile there is here a priority of order, it is coupled with simultaneity in time. Concretely the two coincide and always go together.”140 Bavinck adds:

Active justification has a tendency, so to speak, to communicate itself in faith and by faith to bring about its own acceptance. How could a benefit of Christ be to our advantage if it did not enter into our possession? How could a prison inmate benefit from his acquittal if he was not informed of it and the prison doors were not opened for him? And what advantage would there be for us in a justification in the eternal decree, in the resurrection of Christ, and in the proclamation of the gospel, if God did not personally impart it to us in the internal call by faith? . . . Active and passive justification, accordingly, cannot be separated even for a second, and—in Scripture, in the writings of the Reformers, and in practical instruction—are combined in a single term.141

In other words, active justification occurs with a view to faith, and justification is actually terminated and realized through and by that faith in the dimension of passive justification. If justification were terminated in active justification, it would certainly violate the biblical principle of justification sola fide. But if justification is actualized in passive justification through and by faith, which is brought about on the objective foundation of active justification (viz., God objectively justifies sinners solely on the basis of Christ’s death and resurrection), justification sola fide and active justification are compatible, not contradictory. That is, active justification does not in fact neglect faith; rather, it grounds what occurs in justification on account of faith or on the basis of faith. For Christ and only Christ is all the benefit and righteousness that allows sinners to be justified,142 and

139 Bavinck, GD, 4:203 (§51.475); RD, 4:219.
140 Bavinck, GD, 4:203 (§51.475); RD, 4:219.
142 “Als nu de Schrift van deze rechtvaardigmaking in sensu concreto zegt, dat zij geschiedt uit en door het geloof, dan wil ze daarmee niet te kennen geven, dat ze door dat geloof wordt voortgebracht en bewerkt, want immers is Christus al onze gerechtigheid, en alle weldaden van het genadeverbond zijn
this is what active justification clearly states.

4.2.2.6. Significance of the Distinction between Active and Passive Justification

Why does the logical distinction between active and passive justification matter? Bavinck divides the answer to this question into three reasons. Each reason in its own way fundamentally secures God’s place in justification, a position that has often been attacked by diverse forms of nomism, subjectivism, and rationalism, etc. All of these forms overemphasize the role that humans play in justification.¹⁴³

First, active justification clarifies what or who is the beginning point of justification. Bavinck states that the notion of active justification “enables us, against all forms of nomism, to maintain the rich and joyful content of the gospel that God is gracious and abounding in steadfast love and that in Christ he has brought about a complete righteousness in which we can rest both in life and in death and that in no way needs to be augmented or increased by us.”¹⁴⁴ Active justification therefore informs us of the basis on which justification is founded, i.e., not the human side, but the divine side. Viewed this way, religion becomes the foundation of morality (de religie wordt de grondslag van de moraal), not vice versa.¹⁴⁵ That is, the beginning of justification is that “God on his part, freely and out of unconditional compassion, enters into a relationship


¹⁴⁵ Bavinck, *GD*, 4:205 (§51.475); *RD*, 4:221.
with us, *admits* us into his fellowship [by Christ] despite all our trespasses, and *assures* us of his eternal and unchanging favor” (emphasis added).\footnote{Bavinck, *GD*, 4:205 (§51.475); *RD*, 4:221.} Active justification therefore explains that the door of justification is first opened by God at his good pleasure, not by human beings.

Second, active justification not only makes God the initial point of justification, but also makes it clear that the “whole process” of justification is also governed and controlled by God.\footnote{Yet, emphasizing God not only as the beginning point, but also as the governor of the whole process of justification does not mean that Bavinck’s view of justification is far from the Trinitarian perspective. Rather, Bavinck sees the process of justification in the Trinitarian outlook: “Pater justificat effective, Filius meritorie, Spiritus Sanctus applicative.” See Bavinck, *GD*, 4:188 (§51.472); *RD*, 4:205. Bavinck here cites de Moor’s *Commentarius perpetuus in Johannis Marckii. Compendium theologae Christianae didactico-elencticum* (Leiden, 1761-1771), 4:562.} Active justification strictly forbids any possibility that at any stage justification occurs by the sinner’s self-examination or inner pious experience.\footnote{Bavinck, *GD*, 4:205 (§51.475); *RD*, 4:221.}

Bavinck knows that if sinners could come to the tribunal or judgment seat of God and be justified through their own process of self-examination it would be “anthropomorphic” (*antropomorfistisch*) and “unworthy of God” (*God onwaardig*).\footnote{Bavinck, *GD*, 4:205 (§51.475); *RD*, 4:221.} Thus, Bavinck affirms that in active justification “the basis of faith exists outside of us in the promise of God. Those who build upon it will not be put to shame.”\footnote{Bavinck, *GD*, 4:205 (§51.475); *RD*, 4:221.}

Third, Bavinck asserts that the distinction between active and passive justification provides a valuable opportunity to observe closely the role and nature of faith in justification. The biblical truth that justification is in one sense through and by
faith (i.e., passive justification) has allowed neonomian or other kinds of nomistic persuasions to improperly add human “merit” so that faith might then function as the meritorious cause of justification. Bavinck speaks against thinking of faith as the meritorious cause, stating that “[f]aith, therefore, is not the material or formal cause of justification; it is not even a condition or instrument (instrumental cause) of justification.”  

However, this does not mean that Bavinck totally rules out faith as an instrumental cause in justification, for he does mention the importance of justification “through faith” (διὰ πίστεως). Bavinck’s consideration of faith’s role as an instrumental cause of justification is found in two contexts. In the first, Bavinck emphasizes faith as an instrumental cause when he is speaking of the distinction between active and passive justification. Faith can be neither the formal nor the instrumental cause in active justification, for active justification is unaffected by faith. But in the sphere of passive justification, Bavinck allows that justification does occur by way of a childlike faith, which even then does not originate in the believer but emanates from “wholly outside us in Christ.”  

In the second context, Bavinck intentionally focuses
more on what the object and content of faith are rather than on faith’s role itself as the instrumental cause. For Bavinck, “faith that justifies is precisely the faith that has Christ as its object and content.” Bavinck elaborates on what exactly the object and content of faith are:

Faith is not a condition on which, and not an instrument or organ by which, we receive this benefit, but the very act of accepting Christ and all his benefits as he by his Word and Spirit offers himself to us, and faith therefore includes the consciousness that he is my Lord and that I am his possession. Faith therefore is not an instrument in the true sense, one that serves as the means by which a person accepts Christ, but is a sure knowledge and firm confidence that the Holy Spirit works in one’s heart and by which he [the Spirit] persuades and assures people that, despite all their sins, they share in Christ and all his benefits (emphasis added).  

For Bavinck, to be justified one does not lean on one’s own faith in an instrumental sense. Rather, there must be the certain knowledge by God’s grace that the Word and Spirit allow the believer to accept Christ and all his benefits. That is the kind of faith that Bavinck presents.  

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156 Cf. Belgic Confession, art. 22: “We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior. Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits, and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins.”
4.3. Summary

In this chapter the first parallel characteristic of definitive sanctification and active justification, i.e., “inseparability,” was examined through the writings of Herman Bavinck, who held that definitive sanctification and active justification could not be logically separated from progressive sanctification and passive justification respectively.

Bavinck, a moderate and eclectic thinker, sees the two sides of both sanctification and justification in the biblical voice, church history, and theological necessity. In Bavinck’s thinking, evangelical sanctification (passive sanctification) is similar to the idea of definitive sanctification. Evangelical sanctification also has the dimensions of objectivity and decisiveness, reveals the fundamental identity of believers, shows the condition to which believers belong, and becomes the foundation for accessing the dimension of progressive sanctification. Active sanctification is logically paired with passive (evangelical) sanctification in a manner similar to the way that definitive sanctification is logically paired with progressive sanctification; the human agent becomes actively devoted to sanctification throughout life. For Bavinck the two dimensions of active and passive sanctification cannot be separated, for they are not only two dimensions of the same reality “holiness,” but also are one aspect of an organic chain.

As with sanctification, Bavinck’s view of justification also has a twofold perspective: active and passive justification. Together these ideas avoid nomistic and antinomistic error because they provide a balance between God’s side and the human side without overemphasizing either in the realm of justification. Active justification is a judicial and objective decision made solely by God; passive justification is the actual and
subjective possession of it. Thus active justification is an acquisition of redemption; passive justification is an application of this acquisition. The distinction between active and passive justification is not temporal, but logical. If it were understood to be a temporal order, the idea of eternal justification which violates the framework “decree in eternity and its execution in time,” would have to be allowed. In the logical order between active and passive justification, “actual” justification is terminated and realized, not in active justification, but in passive justification sola fide. Active justification and passive justification are never separated, for they are logically one aspect in the sequence of salvation and need to be understood as one organic process.

In the next chapter, the second parallel characteristic of definitive sanctification and active justification, i.e., “objectivity and decisiveness,” will be examined with Alexander Comrie.
CHAPTER 5
PARALLEL CHARACTERISTIC NO. 2:
OBJECTIVITY AND DECISIVENESS IN ALEXANDER COMRIE

Through his soteriology Alexander Comrie (1706-1774) helped to establish the meaning and validity of the “objective” and “decisive” dimensions of salvation. To that end, in Het A. B. C. des Geloofs (the ABC’s of faith) Comrie puts forward a conception of sanctification that is remarkably similar to the definition of definitive sanctification presented in Chapter 3 of this study.¹ In Brief over de rechtvaerdigmakinge des zondaars (Letter Concerning the Sinners’ Justification, hereafter Brief)² Comrie also defines justification of the sinner from its objective inception using the distinction between active and passive justification. In this chapter we will deal briefly with Comrie in the context of the Nadere Reformatie and the theological conflicts of his time; we will then analyze Comrie’s use of a concept analogous to definitive sanctification. We will go on to compare his concept of active justification to eternal justification and compare his views to those of Eaton and Brine who we saw going over this ground in Chapter 3; Comrie’s

¹ Alexander Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, of verhandeling van de benamingen des saligmakenden geloofs volgens de letteren van het alphabet (Leiden, 1746). For the English translation, see Alexander Comrie, The ABC of Faith, trans. M. J. Banfield (Ossett: Zoar Publications, 1978). Hereafter the Dutch and English edition will be respectively cited as Het A. B. C. des geloofs and The ABC of Faith. Subsequent quotations will be taken mostly from Banfield’s translation, but if necessary, the translation will be modified in consultation with the original Dutch text. When quoted from the Dutch text, the original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages. Comrie mentions that the nature of “faith,” which is treated throughout Het A. B. C. des geloofs, is neither historical faith, nor faith of miracle, but “saving faith” (zaligmakende gelaof). See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, XVII.

² Alexander Comrie, Brief over de rechtvaerdigmakinge des zondaars: door de onmiddelyke toereekening der borggerechtigheid van Christus, 2nd ed. (J. Bloemsma, 1832). Hereafter this edition will be cited as Brief followed by page number. When quoted from the Dutch text, the original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages.
methodology is more complex and nuanced than theirs. This last comparison will produce a second line of criticism of Comrie’s view of justification. Clarification of the meaning of active justification was originally intended to resolve a series of misunderstandings; his resolution of these misunderstandings further refines Comrie’s view of salvation. Thus the overall goal of this chapter is to analyze his work in this regard.

5.1. Comrie in the *Nadere Reformatie*, the Dutch Further Reformation

Although he held an excellent reputation among the theologians of the *Nadere Reformatie* such as Willem Teellinck (1579-1629), William Ames (1576-1633), Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), Herman Witsius (1636-1708), and Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711), Comrie wrote in relative obscurity. Abraham Kuyper saw Comrie as a theologian of whom others were “inexplicable[y] ignoran[t].” The “ignorance” or neglect of Comrie that Kuyper noticed in 1882 continues to this day. He may have gone unnoticed simply

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because all the writers who were part of the *Nadere Reformatie* are generally undervalued outside their movement, either because they were eclipsed by other traditions or due to critical assessments of the *Nadere Reformatie per se*.

Comrie and the other *Nadere Reformatie* theologians wrote from roughly 1600 to 1750.\(^5\) The term *Nadere Reformatie* literally means a “nearer,” “more intimate,” or “more precise” Reformation.\(^6\) A variety of traditions co-existed with theirs including Dutch Puritanism, Dutch Pietism, Dutch Second Reformation, and English Puritanism. The *Nadere Reformatie* and English Puritanism are closely related theologically and historically,\(^7\) but scholars recognize a difference in that the English Puritans were more

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interested than the *Nadere Reformatie* in reforming church and government; Dutch Puritanism differs from the *Nadere Reformatie* in this as well. The *Nadere Reformatie* also has much in common with Pietism in that they both stress individual piety and a vigorous Christian life, so some scholars have identified the *Nadere Reformatie* as a type of Pietism. However, here again their differing views of the role of religion in government as well as their attitude toward Protestant orthodoxy sets the *Nadere Reformatie* apart from Pietism. Equating the *Nadere Reformatie* with Dutch Pietism

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9 Dutch scholars tend to pay attention to an endemic Dutch phenomena as the source to promote the *Nadere Reformatie*. For example, C. Graafland admits that the *Nadere Reformatie* is influenced by English Puritanism in a fairly large measure, but not in an exclusive measure because of the existence of other non-English factors. See C. Graafland, “De invloed van het puritanisme op het ontstaan van het reformeerdt pietisme in Nederland,” *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 7, no. 1 (1983): 2.


12 As Beeke points out, Pietism in German Lutheranism was more concerned with the believer’s inner life than with transforming society, whereas the *Nadere Reformatie* was very much concerned with both. Not only that, Pietism was generally opposed to doctrinal precision which is emphasized by Protestant scholastic theology, whereas the *Nadere Reformatie* tried to formulate a precise doctrine of Reformed orthodoxy. See Beeke, “Evangelicalism and the Dutch Further Reformation,” 163. However, some writers pose the pietism of the *Nadere Reformatie* against scholastic orthodoxy. See, e.g., C. Graafland, “Gereformeerde Scholastiek VI: De invloed van de scholastiek op de Nadere Reformatie,” *Theologia Reformata* 30 (1987): 109-131, 313-340; idem, “De gereformeerde orthodoxie en het pietisme in Nederland,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 19 (1965): 478-479. The scholarship has attempted to prove a continuity between the *Nadere Reformatie* and Protestant Reformed scholastic orthodoxy. On this, see Muller, *After Calvin*, 74-75, 91; idem, *PRRD*, 1:31-32, 66-67, 81-83; Beeke, “Personal Assurance of Faith”; idem, “The Dutch Second Reformation (Nadere Reformatie)”; Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus Van...*
also is not workable. The term “Dutch Further Reformation” fits the Nadere Reformatie because the movement sprang up within the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) as a reaction to the absence of a “living” faith. Despite criticisms to the contrary, Dutch Further Reformed theologians did wish to more precisely further reform the public life of the church, society, and state at least to some extent, but these Dutch divines mainly wanted to further apply the spirit of the Reformation to the believers’ own life and experience. Comrie’s main interest was this

13 Pronk is reluctant to classify the Nadere Reformatie as “Pietism” since he thinks that “Pietism represents more the movement in Germany, the Hutterites with Count Zinzendorf, etc., which had a Lutheran background.” See Pronk, “The Dutch Puritans,” 1.


desire to be more precisely and further reformed in one’s personal life.17

Critical assessment of the Dutch Further Reformation has been mixed.18 Joel Beeke,19 Richard Muller,20 Ernest Stoeffler,21 J. H. R. Verboom,22 Jonathan Gerstner,23 Adriaan Neele,24 and others view the *Nadere Reformatie* positively as a mature Dutch Reformed orthodoxy with a strong notion of piety. Others have a more negative view; even though he basically shares the spirit of the *Nadere Reformatie*, Abraham Kuyper regards the movement’s “old writers” as “too pietistic,” even equating them with Methodism.25 As a theologian who emphasizes reforming and transforming the whole of church, culture, and society, Kuyper would prefer that the *Nadere Reformatie* express a

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20 Muller, *PRRD*, 81-83, 158 (notes that “both the Puritan piety and the piety of the *Nadere Reformatie* stand not as developments opposed to confessional orthodoxy and scholastic exposition of doctrine but rather as developments integral to confessional orthodoxy that addressed issues of spirituality in literary genres that were not specifically ‘scholastic.’”); idem, *After Calvin*, 18, 31.


22 Verboom, *Dr. Alexander Comrie*, 185ff.

23 “[In the Dutch Further Reformaton,] the absolute necessity of the truths of the Word of God [is] applied in individuals lives, in the church’s mode of worship, and in the society as a whole.” See Gerstner, *The Thousand Generation Covenant*, 75.


stronger desire for universal transformation rather than their narrower focus on individual piety. The emphasis on individual piety in the Dutch Further Reformation has been an object of concern since Kuyper; E. D. Kraan sees a strong tendency toward “subjectivism” in the *Nadere Reformatie*. Van der Linde regards the Dutch Further Reformation as a “radical” form of individualistic pietism. C. Graafland maintains that the excessive emphasis on the individual's spiritual contemplation which marked the *Nadere Reformatie* fails to a disturbing degree to embrace the broader aspects of the theology of that time. Yet the unique value of the *Nadere Reformatie*, which integrates confessional orthodoxy and scholastic precision of doctrine with pious spirituality, should not be tainted by these negative assessments. Comrie should be respected for the value

26 Pronk evaluates that “although much good was accomplished under the leadership of this genius [Kuyper], eventually the preoccupation of the neo-Calvinists with cultural involvement led to the neglect of vital religion.” See Pronk, “The Dutch Puritans,” 8. See also William Young, “Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (1973): 48-64; Beeke, “The Dutch Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*),” 321.


of his theology from within the Dutch Further Reformation.

5.2. Comrie and Theological Conflict

The main opposing viewpoints to Comrie’s theology were rationalism, the Enlightenment, Arminianism, and neonomianism. Comrie rejected the rationalistic teaching of Antonius van der Os (1722-1807), minister of Zwolle, who ignored the authoritative church confessions and biblical teachings such as the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and the punishment of eternal death as a result of original sin. Comrie portrayed Van der Os as a Socinian-minded Remonstrant (Sociniaansch gezinden Remonstrant). Jan van den Honert (1693-1758), a professor at Leiden from 1734 who stood somewhere between orthodoxy and the Enlightenment, labels Comrie’s view of justification as a form of eternal justification. However, throughout his Brief Comrie defended his position with vigor and success; the next section will examine this


32 Comrie, *Brief*, 55.


35 The content of Van den Honert’s letter which contains his objection to Comrie’s doctrine of justification is included in Comrie, *Brief*, 55-69.

36 The present study will use the 1892 edition rather than the 1761 edition.
in detail.

Comrie joined Nicholas Holtius (1693-1773) in writing ten dialogues entitled *Examen van het ontwerp van tolerantie* (An Examination of the Design of Tolerance, 1753-1757), opposing Arminian attempts to invalidate Reformed doctrines established in the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Comrie especially guards against any form of Arminianism that alters the Reformed doctrine of justification. Comrie is also sensitive to neonomianist teaching that if a sinner’s obedience to the gospel is the foundation of justification on the basis of Christ’s righteousness, then this obedience constitutes a “new law” (*neonomos*) that the sinner must follow. Comrie believes that Arminian and neonomian teachings give human agency too prominent a place in salvation. As Kuyper points out, the sharpest theological conflict in Comrie’s time was the issue of how to best harmonize God’s grace and human responsibility in soteriology. Against

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38 In this regard, it is understandable why Comrie translated Isaac Chauncy’s book into Dutch who is an active opponent of neonomianism. See Isaac Chauncy, *De Leere der Waarheit, die na de Godtzaligheid is, gegrondt op de Heilige Schriftuur, volgens den leidraadt van den kleinen Catechismus der Westmunstersche Godtgeleerden*, trans. Alexander Comrie (Leyden, 1757).


40 Kuyper notes: “[T]he controversy between Rome [emphasizing human responsibility] and Protestantism [emphasizing God’s sovereignty] always had been, and still was in Comrie’s time, as it is in ours . . .” See Kuyper, “Alexander Comrie: His Conflict in Holland,” 198.
opinions that were tipped toward human agency, Comrie constantly emphasized the definitive and decisive dimension of salvation.

5.3. Comrie’s Soteriological Views

5.3.1. Comrie and Definitive Sanctification

Comrie’s views on sanctification have been studied relatively little, especially compared to his work on justification. 41 This may be in part because Comrie’s view of sanctification is less controversial than his more complex conception of justification which draws more attention not only from his contemporaries but also from later interpreters. 42 Yet Comrie’s view of sanctification deserves to be thoroughly examined here since he leans heavily on the importance of the “objective and decisive” aspect. This emphasis is seen in his Het A. B. C. des Geloofs in which he discusses the diverse dimensions of the Christian faith. This section examines (1) Comrie’s presentation of an idea analogous to definitive sanctification and (2) the “causal” language in his treatment of sanctification.

41 Comrie’s view of sanctification is not addressed even in Honig and Graafland’s work which are specifically focused on Comrie’s doctrinal view. Even in chapter 2 which dealt with Comrie as a dogmatist, Honig paid attention only to Comrie’s view of regeneration, faith, justification, and predestination, not to sanctification. Cf. Honig, Alexander Comrie, 182-252. Graafland also dealt with Comrie’s doctrinal view in a comprehensive outlook, but did not specifically take notice of the subject of sanctification. Cf. C. Graafland, “Alexander Comrie (1706-1774),” in De Nadere Reformatie: beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers, ed. T. Brienen et al. (’s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1986), 315-347.

42 This point will be dealt with in detail in the next section.
5.3.1.1. Four Core Characteristics in Comrie’s Definitive Sanctification

As seen in the preceding chapter, the core characteristics of definitive sanctification can be described using four features: objectiveness and decisiveness, identity, condition, and definitive sanctification as the ground of progressive sanctification.\(^{43}\)

Comrie first sees sanctification as grounded on an “objective” foundation, which by definition cannot begin with the believer. To be sanctified believers need to belong to Christ in and through mystical union with him, but “they were not by nature belonging unto Christ, O no; [for] they are of their father the devil, children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:3).”\(^{44}\) Comrie therefore says, “[T]here will be no union [with Christ], unless He first on His side lays hold. It is God who first loves, and therefore He draws with lovingkindness” (emphasis added).\(^{45}\) Strictly speaking, the believer’s sanctification through union with Christ is neither controlled by the believers’ willingness to participate, nor based on any subjective ground as its origin. Rather, the beginning point, not process, of union with Christ is totally “objective” in that the believer is not at all involved in God’s eternal counsel (pactum salutis).\(^{46}\) For Comrie, both the definitive and progressive dimensions of sanctification start with God: “[A]ll God’s mercies and

\(^{43}\) For this, see chapter 2 of this study.

\(^{44}\) Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 17; The ABC of Faith, 14. “[Z]ij waren niet Christus’ eigendom van nature, o neen, zij zijn uit hun vader, de duivel, kinderen des toorns, gelijk anderen, Efêze 2: 3.”

\(^{45}\) Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 17-18; The ABC of Faith, 14. “[E]r zal geen vereniging zijn, tenzij Hij eerst van zijn kant aangrijpt. Het is toch God die eerst liefheeft, en daarom trekt Hij in goedertierenheid.”

\(^{46}\) “[Z]ij Gods gelegde fondament onder het oog krijgen, zoals dat gelegd is in de vrederaad, in de dood van de Middelaar, en in de aanbieding van het Evangelie.” See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 125; The ABC of Faith, 134.
blessings produce a desired effect in the hearts of God’s children, to incite them to the practice of virtues from a renewed principle [*een vernieuwd beginsel*], and to bring them with godly [people].”

In addition, Comrie sees that both the “objective” and “decisive” dimensions of sanctification are grounded in Christ’s perfect holiness. Believers can experience perfect holiness only when they share in Christ’s holiness, inasmuch as “it [holiness] is fulfilled in Christ [*in Christus . . . voldaan*], and is for their [believers] benefit, to sanctify them, and to conform them unto Him.”

There is a particular point at which the believers’ sanctification is decisively accomplished and fulfilled by virtue of sharing in Christ’s perfect achieved holiness. Yet as Comrie stresses below, this decisive dimension of sanctification neither minimizes the necessity of progressive sanctification, nor defines a state of sinlessness. Rather, it means that sanctification is first based on the objective and decisive ground of Christ’s accomplished work, the *pactum salutis*, etc., not on any unstable, subjective ground.

Second, Comrie speaks of the “identity,” i.e., who believers fundamentally are in definitive sanctification. Comrie affirms that “believers are holy since they are renewed in all the powers of their soul; they are created in God’s image in knowledge,

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47 Comrie, *Het A. B. C. des geloofs*, 63; *The ABC of Faith*, 64. According to Beeke, this “renewed principle” (*een vernieuwd beginsel*) is the *habitus* of faith. This means the “principle, capacity, ability (*potentia*), faculty, ‘increated’ (*ingeschapen*), and inherent (*inklevenende*) habit of faith.” By *actus*, Comrie meant “activities, such as saving knowledge, saving assent, and saving confidence, which flow out of the habit or principle of faith. Thus, the habit of faith is infused into the soul by God, whereas the acts of faith make faith a practical reality.” Yet, Beeke mentions that this *habitus-actus* distinction does not approve of a split concept of faith. Rather, this distinction emphasizes the unity of oneness (*eenheid*). See Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 218-227. In this regard, the *habitus-actus* distinction and its unity of oneness seem to be similar to the distinction of definitive (principle of sanctification) and progressive sanctification (practical reality of sanctification) and their inseparable nature.

48 Comrie, *Het A. B. C. des geloofs*, 44; *The ABC of Faith*, 46. “Zij beginn Zijn heiligheid te zien. O! die is in Christus ook voldaan, en is ten beste van hen, om hen te heiligen, en met Zich gelijkvormig te maken.”
righteousness and true holiness.”⁴⁹ Comrie points to the scriptural truth that those who are created in God’s image in holiness become “a Royal Priesthood [Koninklijk Priesterdom] and a holy and peculiar people [een heilig en verkregen volk] (Jer. 23:5).”⁵⁰ Comrie believes that through “sprinkling clean water upon [them], sinners are sanctified (1 Cor 6:11) and can be cleaned (Ezek 36:25) and washed of all filths of the daughters of Zion (Isa 4:4).”⁵¹ For Comrie, knowing who believers fundamentally are (identity) is a crucial matter, inasmuch as this is the driving force for progressing toward the sanctified life and putting on unassailable armor against sin in spiritual combat.⁵²

Third, for Comrie definitive sanctification is also a “condition” or a mode of being in which the believer is conformed and shares in Christ’s perfect holiness in and through union with Himself. Comrie sees that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the believers’ state (staat) and condition (toestand) before God is irrevocably changed.⁵³ This new state of the believer refers to putting on the armor of light (Rom 13:12) in contrast to the “state of nature, the pitch-black darkness, in which every unregenerate sinner lives.”⁵⁴ Comrie urges believers to adhere to Christ no matter what else may

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⁴⁹ Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 62; The ABC of Faith, 63. “... de gelovigen zijn heilig, omdat zij vernieuwd worden in al de vermogens van hun ziel; zij zijn naar Gods evenbeeld geschapen in kennis, in gerechtigheid en ware heiligheid.”

⁵⁰ Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 5; The ABC of Faith, 2. In the English translation, the word “a Purchased People” is added.

⁵¹ See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 9-10; The ABC of Faith, 6.

⁵² See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 13; The ABC of Faith, 9. “[G]elijk het zaligmakende geloof Jezus als een kleed aandoet, zo doet het ook aan de wapenen des lichts, om in de geestelijke krijg tegen zonde, satan en wereld te strijden.”

⁵³ See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 28; The ABC of Faith, 29.

⁵⁴ Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 13; The ABC of Faith, 9.
“Aanhangen” (stick or affix). Yet Comrie warns that this condition of sticking to Christ in communion and union with Him must not be misunderstood as a “melting” of the soul into the Divine Being as the pantheist Platonists and Mystics describe it. Instead, Comrie describes union with Christ as accomplished when He first approaches and is united with believers, then they place their faith in Him. Our understanding should not be tainted by thinking that the believer’s imperfect and corrupted nature could somehow play the initial part in conforming us to Christ’s perfect holiness. Rather, we should cling to the idea that Christ’s perfect holiness “constitutes their [believers] riches, in making them to be conformed to His image, whereby they are to be sanctified, are to increase in glory and remain constant [emphasis added].”

Fourth, Comrie points out that in definitive sanctification we see the foundation for progressive sanctification. By this he means that salvation is never based on the human being’s own will or strength, but rather only and ever on God’s. According to Comrie, believers do not and cannot strive for sanctification on their own since they are

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56 “... evenwel zo niet te verstaan is, gelijk de Platonischen en de Mystieken drijven, alsof de zielen van dezulken één met God waren, door een insmelten in het Goddelijke Wezen.” See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 15-16; _The ABC of Faith_, 12. According to Kuyper, union with Christ is neither mechanical union, nor matrimonial union; rather, this is “mystical union” as a result of indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Kuyper, “Alexander Comrie: His Conflict in Holland,” 201.

57 Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 16-17; _The ABC of Faith_, 13. Comrie does not want granted faith to be thought as an efficient cause or _actus_ of union with Christ. On Comrie’s view of faith, see also Comrie, _Brief_, 118-120.

58 _Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs_, 33; _The ABC of Faith_, 34-35. “Zijn heiligheid is ook hun rijkdom, om hem Zijn beeld gelijkvormig te maken, waardoor zij geheiligd zullen worden, in heiligheid toenemen en bestendig blijven.”
powerless (onmachtig) and incapable (onbekwaam) of any good thought or work.⁵⁹

Comrie makes it clear that “nothing can be pleasing to God unless it first comes down from Him who is the Father of lights and the Giver of every good and perfect gift.”⁶⁰

Comrie militates against the individual’s religious and spiritual activities (e.g., worship, prayer, sacrament, benevolence, etc.) being the foundation of salvation, inasmuch as these are fundamentally weak and trembling.⁶¹ In Comrie’s conception the individual’s exercise of sanctification is an “approximate” work (nabijkomend werk), not a “right” work (recht werk).⁶² Instead, the true work of carrying on progressive sanctification is to first remember what Christ has definitively done for believers, thereby discerning their ultimate identity and in what condition they remain. Comrie therefore lays emphasis on the objective and decisive foundation of both justification and sanctification, i.e., a “covenant of peace in the death of the Mediator and in the setting-forth of the Gospel.”⁶³

5.3.1.2. Causal Language

Comrie’s emphasis on the objective and decisive dimension of sanctification can also be seen in his use of causal language. Over against the teachings of Baruch Spinoza (1632-

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⁵⁹ See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 77; The ABC of Faith, 79.

⁶⁰ Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 77; The ABC of Faith, 79. “Het is klaar, dat Gode niets behagen kan, of het moet eerst van Hem afdalen, die de Vader der lichten en Gever van alle gaven en volmaakte giften is.”

⁶¹ See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 124-125; The ABC of Faith, 132-133.

⁶² Banfield translated the term nabijkomend werk into an “almost-work.” See Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 24; The ABC of Faith, 22.

⁶³ Comrie, Het A. B. C. des geloofs, 125; The ABC of Faith, 134.
1677) and Pontiaan van Hattem (1641-1706), whom Comrie felt taught the unacceptable doctrine (*gruwelijke leer*) that man is totally passive,\(^{64}\) Comrie insists that “true teaching regards God as the first, but man also as [the] second cause of all his doings.”\(^{65}\) For Comrie, both determinism (neglecting the secondary cause) and libertarianism (overemphasizing the power of the secondary cause) are erroneous. Comrie believes that the dimension of progressive sanctification (subjective as secondary cause) is firmly grounded in the dimension of definitive sanctification (objective and decisive as primary cause). Even in progressive sanctification where human agents work and act throughout the remainder of their lifetime, God’s grace on the basis of Christ’s objective and decisive work is still the first cause. Comrie notes that “sanctification must certainly grow each of the graces [progressive sanctification] in a true Christian who is set upon true holiness [definitive sanctification].”\(^{66}\) Believers first become “holy” people by virtue of union with Christ’s perfect holiness, then on this basis they live a sanctified life commensurate with who they are. Because of definitive sanctification believers can and do carry on sanctification progressively for the rest of their lives.

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\(^{64}\) According to Winfried Schröder, theologians were troubled even more by van Hattem than any others for three reasons: (1) van Hattem was heavily indebted to Spinoza; (2) van Hattem had managed to gather a large group of partisans including Spinozists; and (3) van Hattem had taught the most pernicious doctrines from Spinoza’s system. On the relationship between Spinoza and Pontiaan van Hattem, see Winfried Schröder, “‘. . . Spinozam Tota Armenta in Belgio Sequi Ducem’: The Reception of the Early Dutch Spinozists in Germany,” in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism Around 1700: Papers Presented at the International Colloquium Held at Rotterdam, 5-8 October 1994*, eds. Wiep Van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 157-169. For a detailed discussion about Spinoza and the Netherlanders, see H. J. Siebrand, *Spinoza and the Netherlanders: An Inquiry into the Early Reception of His Philosophy of Religion* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988).

\(^{65}\) Comrie, *Het A. B. C. des geloofs*, 147; *The ABC of Faith*, 160. “... de ware leer God als de eerste, maar de mens ook als een tweede oorzaak van al zijn doen aanmerkt.”

\(^{66}\) Comrie, *Het A. B. C. des geloofs*, 78; *The ABC of Faith*, 80. “... heiligheid moet elk van de genade in een waar christen, die gezet is op ware heiligheid, inderdaad groeien.”
Causal language is even more evident in Comrie’s discussion of justification. Just as in sanctification, Comrie defines the objective and decisive dimension while observing the distinction between active and passive justification. This will be laid out in the next section.

5.3.2. Comrie and Active Justification

Reviews of Comrie’s concept of justification have been mixed. Graafland points out that Comrie’s doctrine of justification is somewhat ambivalent, even appearing to allow justification from eternity, thus inviting criticism from his contemporaries.\(^6^7\) Also concerned about Comrie’s supposed acceptance of justification from eternity, K. Exalto contends that Comrie depends more on deductive and logical reasoning rather than on Scripture, and in so doing has moved far from Reformed teaching.\(^6^8\) Gerrit A. van den Brink also criticizes Comrie’s view of imputation, believing that Comrie errs in seeing the fundamental cause of justification in the immediacy of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness without the aspect of faith.\(^6^9\) Van den Brink regards Comrie as a “Dutch representative of English antinomianism” for downplaying the instrumental role of faith in his later writings.\(^7^0\) According to J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, even though the

\(^6^7\) Graafland, “Alexander Comrie (1706-1774),” 337-338.


\(^6^9\) Gerrit A. van den Brink, “‘Elke daad is een werk’, Alexander Comrie (1706-1774) over de verschillen tussen de remonstrantse en de gereformeerde rechtvaardigingsleer,” Theologia Reformata 55, no. 2 (2012): 146-164.

\(^7^0\) Gerrit A. van den Brink, “Comrie en het Antinomianisme,” Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie 30, no. 2 (2006): 112-156. Recently, Van den Brink tries to find the doctrinal similarities between John Cotton (1585-1652) who was in the midst of the most vehement controversy which occurred in Massachusetts in New England during the years 1636-1638 and Comrie. See Gerrit A. van den Brink,
motivation for Comrie’s view of justification is laudable its doctrinal development is an “artifact.” Criticism from Comrie’s contemporaries, e.g., the Leiden professors Joan van den Honert and Jan Jacob Schultens (1716-1778), closely relates to this as well. Indeed most criticisms of Comrie’s views on justification arise from his supposed theology of eternal justification and imputation.

G. H. Kersten does distinguish Comrie’s view of justification from antinomian tenets which he characterizes as “deny[ing] the necessity of subjective justification.” Kuyper expresses tepid agreement with Comrie’s doctrine of justification stating that “[f]or my part, at least, I keep to the exquisite distinction [of active/passive justification].” But Kuyper continues, “Nor is the preceding exposition of Comrie’s

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71 Van Genderen and Velema, Concise Reformed Dogmatics, 622.
73 Kersten, Reformed Dogmatics, 2:417. Kersten adds, “The turmoil stirred up by the Arminians, among whom were the Leiden professors Vanden Honert, Jr. and Schultens, against Comrie and Holtius, caused even Vander Groe to take his pen to oppose the doctrine of justification from eternity, but when he heard that Comrie and his colleagues soundly maintained the necessity of justification by faith, he gave up the task.” See Kersten, Reformed Dogmatics, 2:416-417 (emphasis in the original).
74 Here, Kuyper cites Johannes Hoornbeek’s (1617-1666) exposition of the distinction between active and passive justification: “Active justification is the act of the justifying God; passive justification is its termination and application to individual believers. Justification was destined from all eternity in the
views [of justification] to be considered as an unreserved and entire approval of his argumentation.” In Kuyper’s opinion, Comrie’s “method of treating his subject (as an antithesis to its negative) is always one-sided.” Nevertheless, Kuyper praises the part that Comrie’s overall theology and clear language play in defending Dutch churches from rationalism, especially in comparison to the ineffective German mediating theology of his time. Bavinck is generally neutral, but he often cites Cromrie’s Brief for its analysis of the distinction between active and passive justification.

When evaluating Comrie’s treatment of the habitus and actus of faith, Beeke asserts that “[i]f Comrie erred in emphasizing justification from eternity too strongly, he did so within the boundaries of historic Reformed faith.” According to Beeke, Comrie did not go as far out of the way as Kuyper, staying within his “mediating position” in asserting that justification is not fully actualized in eternal justification (in the decree of God) and in collective justification (in the resurrection of Christ), but must also include passive justification sola fide (in the court of consciousness). J. P. Lilley, A. G. Honig,

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Divine decree: it was promised soon after the Fall; it was realized in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. viii. 34) (merited by Christ through His death; declared and ratified by God in His resurrection); it is applied and manifested in the heart of the believer; and it shall hereafter be gloriously consummated in the day of final and universal judgment.” See Johannes Hoornbeeck, *Summa controversiarum religionis cum infidelibus, haereticis, schismaticis*, 2nd ed. (Utrecht, 1658), 815-816. Cf. Abraham Kuyper, “Alexander Comrie: Lessons from His Career,” *Catholic Presbyterian* 7 (1882): 279 (note.*).

75 Kuyper, “Alexander Comrie: Lessons from His Career,” 279n*.


78 Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 239.

and J. H. R. Verboom also generally approve of Comrie.\textsuperscript{80}

The lack of consensus in the theological community regarding Comrie’s doctrine of justification is a by-product of Comrie’s complex presentation; when this complexity is resolved a positive picture of Comrie’s concept of justification emerges. However, one key criticism levelled against Comrie is his supposed acceptance of justification from eternity. The next section focuses on exposing his true theology as elucidated in his \textit{Brief}; at the same time this study will fully reveal Comrie’s conception of active justification. Our commentary is divided into four topics: (1) Comrie’s distinction between active and passive justification; (2) his actual concept of eternal justification; (3) his view of the difference between active and eternal justification; and (4) his causal language. In the end we will see that just as in his definition of sanctification, Comrie uses complex and nuanced methods to present the “objective” and “decisive” dimension of justification.

5.3.2.1. Comrie Distinguishes between Active and Passive Justification

Comrie introduced his distinction between active and passive justification in the foreword to \textit{Brief}. Here he wrote, “God, who justifies the ungodly is \textit{active} [\textit{dadelijk}, “immediate”], and he who is justified and receives the testimony of the forgiveness of his sins is \textit{passive} [\textit{lijdelijk}] with respect to the works of God” (emphasis in the original).\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Lilley, “Alexander Comrie”; Honig, \textit{Alexander Comrie}; Verboom, \textit{Dr. Alexander Comrie}.

\textsuperscript{81} Comrie, \textit{Brief}, iv. “… Godt, die den godtloozen rechtvaerdigt, dadelijk is, en die gerechtsvaerdigt wordt, en het getuigenis van de vergevinge zijner zonden ontvangt, in opzigt tot de werkinge Gods, lijdelijk.” For the same exposition of the distinction, see Maccovius, \textit{Collegia}, 423-425; Turretin, \textit{Institutes of Elenctic Theology}, 2:669 (16.7.1); à Brakel, \textit{The Christian’s Reasonable Service}, 2:376. For a detailed discussion of the distinction of active/passive justification, see chapter 3 of this study.
Referencing Voetius, Comrie specified that wherever the term “justification” appeared in *Brief* it always includes both active and passive dimensions of justification.\(^{82}\) For Comrie, active justification is “the establishment of the divine sentence itself, the New Covenant, the promise, and the announcement of it from the side of God,”\(^{83}\) while passive justification signifies the “inspiration, proclamation, and revelation of that sentence in the heart of redeemed.”\(^{84}\) Active justification is established in the *pactum salutis* between God and Christ for all the elect from eternity.\(^{85}\) Comrie adds that in active justification, “the ungodly does nothing whereby he would stimulate God or make active unto his justification, which is still clearer from this, that the whole work of a sinner is ruled out the causes of justification.”\(^{86}\) Comrie finds in Paul’s letters that the sinner’s justification cannot be realized by human works.\(^{87}\) Thus Comrie opposes Arminian and Roman Catholic teachings, both of which stress human works in justification. Comrie has in view the “objective” ground in which God and His works mark the beginning of justification rather than it beginning in human beings and their works.

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82 Comrie, *Brief*, 83. Here, Comrie cites Voetius’ *Selectarum disputationum theologicarum*, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1648-1667), 5:610.

83 Comrie, *Brief*, 83. “... zy [active justification] beteekent de vaststelling zelven van het Goddelijk vonnis, en alzoo van het nieuwe Verbond, de belofte, en de uitspraak daar van, van de zyde Gods.”

84 Comrie, *Brief*, 83. “... zy [passive justification] beteekent de inboezeminge, bekendmaking, openbaringe van dat vonnis in de herten der verlost.”


86 Comrie, *Brief*, iv-v. “... de godtloose niets doet, of werkt, waar door hij Godt tot zijne rechtsvaardigmakinge zoude opwekken of werkzaam maken: het welk daar uit nog klaarder is, dat alle werk des zondaars wordt uitgesloten buiten de oorzaken der rechtsvaardigmakinge.”

87 See Comrie, *Brief*, i.
Unlike Brine, who we saw in Chapter 3 regards justification as completed either in the active dimension or even in eternity and who rejects the idea of passive justification altogether, Comrie says just the opposite:

I have never taught nor thought . . . that eternal justification, as this is an intrinsic act of God in Himself, is justification in its complete engagement . . . On the contrary, I have taught in the Characteristics of Faith [Eigenschappen des Geloofs] that to suppose justification in its completeness of eternity would be Antinomian [emphasis in the original].

Comrie holds that the sinner’s justification is actually completed in in foro conscientiae. He makes it clear that he opposes the view that justification is completed perfectly in eternity. Further distancing himself, Comrie states that “we are not perfectly justified, until we are immediately and personally made partakers of the benefit in the employment or application of it to ourselves through faith” (emphasis in the original).

In Comrie’s view a sinner’s justification is begun in active and terminated in passive justification. Comrie also says that the completion of justification “could neither

88 See, esp., Brine, A Defence, 15-17, 33-34.
89 Comrie, Brief, 88. “. . . heb ik nooit geleert, nog gedagt . . . dat die eeuwige Rechvaerdigmake, zoo als die een onblijvende daad Gods in zig zelven is, de Rechvaerdigmakinge in haar volkomen beslag is . . . In tegendeel heb ik geleert in de Eigenschappen des Geloofs, dat het stellen der Rechvaerdigmakinge in hare volkomenheyt van eeuwigheyt Antinomiaans zoude zijn . . . .” Here Eigenschappen des Geloofs refers to Alexander Comrie, Verhandeling van Eenige Eigenschappen Des Zaligmakenden Geloofs (Leiden: Johannes Hasebroek, 1747).
90 Yet, note that English antinomian theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not exclusively hold the idea of eternal justification. Rather, their main interest was to place justification before faith, to emphasize free justification, and to assert the status of complete elimination of sin. For a detailed discussion regarding this, see chapter 3 of this study.
91 Comrie’s view is certainly far from practical antinomianism, which seeks and has the “lawless” tenets, inasmuch as Comrie severely criticizes people who deny the obligation unto obedience and dispute the Law and calls them “atheists” (atheisten). See Comrie, Brief, 37.
92 Comrie, Brief, 97. “. . . wij evenwel niet volkomen gerechtvaerdigt zijn tot dat wij dadelijk en personeel deelachtig gemaakt worden deze weldaadt, in de toepassinge ofte applicatie daar van aan ons zelve door het geloove . . .”
93 On Comrie’s argument that the completeness of justification is realized in foro conscientiae,
happen from eternity nor in the resurrection of Christ, but took place by God for us with regard to the application at a certain point of time.”  

After seeing Comrie’s reference to the necessity of passive justification in time van den Honert recanted his earlier criticism, writing to Comrie that “this matter [eternal justification] does not touch Rev. Holtius and Dr. Comrie together, but only Rev. Holtius . . . because [unlike Comrie] Rev. Holtius has kept this matter outside of any communication of Classis and placed in a document which has published without any knowledge, visitation, and approbation of the respected Classis.”

In sum, Comrie affirms both active and passive justification in his soteriology. For him the terminal point of justification is not found in the objective ground of active justification but in passive justification in foro conscientiae.

5.3.2.2. Comrie’s View of Eternal Justification

Comrie’s frequent assertion of the objective foundation of justification led to criticism by those who assumed that Comrie must have held to the idea of justification from eternity. Comrie does mention the tenet of eternal justification, but his concept should not be seen as exclusively eternal since he also speaks of the dimension of passive justification sola

see also Comrie, Eigenschappen, 229-262 (Heb 10:22); idem, Heidelbergschen Catechismus, 488-491.

94 Comrie, Brief, 103. “ . . . nog van eeuwigheid nog in Christus opstandinge komende geschieden . . . maar van Godt, met opzigt op de toepassinge, ter bepaalder tijd . . .”

Thus there seems to be a conflict within Comrie’s doctrine of justification, a tension that provoked criticism not only from Comrie’s contemporaries but also from later interpreters.\footnote{Cf. Exalto, “Genadeleer En Heilsweg,” 198; Graafland, “Alexander Comrie (1706-1774),” 337-338; Genderen and Velema, \textit{Concise Reformed Dogmatics}, 622.} In order to properly understand Comrie’s complex position, two important distinctions can be entertained: (1) the distinction between complete justification from eternity and the decree to justify in eternity and (2) the distinction between justification \textit{in sensu diviso} (in the distributive sense) and justification \textit{in sensu concreto} (in the concrete sense).

First, when Comrie uses the term “justification from eternity” \textit{(Rechtvaerdigmakinge van eeuwigheid)}, he actually has in mind the “\textit{decree to justify in eternity.”} For Comrie, God’s eternal decree to justify sinners is objective and firmly fixed inasmuch as this decree is grounded in the ideas of divine simplicity, the absoluteness of the Godhead, and the immutability of God’s will.\footnote{See, esp., Comrie, \textit{Brief}, 74-79.} Comrie says that “everything, which we are made partakers [of] in time [including justification], should be considered as effects of which God had allowed and assigned in Himself from Eternity by an absolute and eternal stipulation of His will according to His Counsel as God, is utterly eternal.”\footnote{Comrie, \textit{Brief}, 75-76. “... alles, dat wij in de tijt deelagtig gemaakt worden, moet aangemerkt worden als uitwerkingen van het geene Godt ons in zig zelfs van Eeuwigheid toebedagt en toegelegt hadde, door een zoo volstrekt eeuwige bepalinge van zijn wil na zijnen raadt, als Godt volstrekt eeuwig is.”} Here Comrie is distinguishing between justification from eternity (i.e., justification which had already been completed in eternity) and the decree to justify in eternity.\footnote{Heppe notes, “The decree of justification is one thing, justification itself is another.” See Heppe, \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}, 557. Herman Hoeksema also mentions that denying eternal justification is evidently not correct if eternal justification refers to God’s eternal decree to justify in the eternal counsel of God. See Hoeksema, \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}, 502. According to Kersten, God’s eternal decree to justify is}
Comrie appears to be speaking just of justification from eternity, he is actually speaking of the effect of the decree more than its eternality. For him, God’s eternal decree is the objective basis for justification, the reality of which for the sinner occurs in time. However, by speaking so often and at such length of the completeness, immutability, and absolute finality of God’s eternal decree to justify, Comrie could be misconstrued as endorsing the “completion” of justification in eternity. In addition, although Comrie does distinguish the intrinsic act in God (ad intra) from the extrinsic act of God (ad extra) in justification, his statements on the “absoluteness” of the eternal intrinsic act of God still make it sound as though he believes justification is completely finalized from eternity just as his critics have charged. In answer to this criticism, Comrie replies in *Brief* that the “benefit [of justification] is to be actually seen as this is received its fulfillment and completion in our conscience through a certain confidence which the Holy Spirit works in our heart that the forgiveness of sin and eternal or blissful righteousness are offered to us from God” (emphasis added). If there is a tension in Comrie, it is not between justification from eternity and justification in time, but his necessary since this can be the firm ground of progressive sanctification. See Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:419-420.

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100 See Comrie, *Brief*, 76.

101 “... en dus, hoe inhlijvende in Godt op zich zelfs aangemerkt, nogtans, ten aanzien van de uitvoering, gewrochten buiten Godt, en van Godt essentialiter onderscheiden.” See Comrie, *Brief*, 75.

102 A radical version of this is Brine’s position. According to Brine, justification is the immanent act of God in eternity and therefore, essentially there is no room for passive justification. See Brine, *A Defence*, 15, 34, 44, 51.

103 Comrie, *Brief*, 142. “... eigentlijk op die weldaadt gezien wordt, zoo als die hare voltooiijinge en volmakinge in onze conscientie ontvangt, door het zekere vertrouwen, dat de H. Geest in onze herten werkt, dat de vergevinge der zonde, de eeuwige gerechtigheid an zaligheid, van Godt aan ons geschonken zijn.”
major emphasis on the absoluteness of God’s decree to justify in eternity (or eternal intrinsic act) over the dimension of passive justification in time.

Second, Comrie’s view of eternal justification needs to be understood in the distinction between justification in the distributive sense (in sensu diviso) and justification in the concrete sense (in sensu concreto). According to Comrie, justification consists of three parts: (1) from eternity; (2) in the resurrection or in the imputation; and (3) in the conscience. For Comrie justification from eternity signifies the eternal decision to justify from the pactum salutis through Christ’s surety; justification in the resurrection or the imputation means the application of the righteousness of Christ to sinners in union with Him; and justification in the conscience stands as the terminal point of the sinners’ justification. Comrie asserts that each of these three parts is perfect in the distributive sense. Yet Comrie also holds that the perfection of each part in the distributive sense should not be understood as the completion of justification in the concrete sense, for the completeness of justification is only achieved in the concrete sense when all three parts are perfectly united. Comrie states, “We are speaking of justification as a totality [TOTUM; geheel aanzien], which receives its perfection when


105 “… hoe gij de weldaad [i.e., the benefit of justification] beschouwt, ofte zoo als die van eeuwigheid uit het Verbondt met Christus, en ons in Hem als zijn zaadt, voortvloeit, door de acceptatie van des Borgs bemiddeling, in welke de persoons verwisselinge tusschen Hem en ons geschiedit is, ofte mede in zijne opstandinge, ofte ook in de onmiddellijke toerekening van zijne geregtigheid en genoegdoeninge door eene overgaande daadt Godts tot ons, en het termineeren van dezelve in de conscientien . . .” See Comrie, *Brief*, 17.

106 “… wij ieder van deze essentieele deelen, in sensu diviso, een zekere volmaaktheid (NB. niet volkomenheid in sensu concreto) toeschrijven: welke volmaaktheid van een ieder deel in sensu diviso, wanneer zij in sensu concreto door vereeniginge met elkander zamengevoegt worden, de volkomenheit van de weldaad uitmaken.” See Comrie, *Brief*, 17.
all the parts, belonging to the whole in order to properly set therewith the totality, are
gathered or combined with one another in its perfection.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, the
completeness of justification occurs neither from eternity, nor in the resurrection, nor in
the conscience alone. Rather, the completeness of justification, according to Comrie, is
accomplished only when each part is comprehensively integrated into the others.¹⁰⁸

It could only be said that Comrie supports the idea of eternal justification if his
statements on the perfection of justification from eternity in the distributive sense in fact
referred to the idea of eternal justification. But Comrie does not conceive of eternal
justification in that sense. He does not say that justification is completely terminated in
God’s eternal immanent act, and he never rejects the dimension of passive justification as
Brine asserts.¹⁰⁹ For as Comrie argued, justification cannot be realized in its totality in
the concrete sense if perfect justification in foro conscientiae is omitted from the
distributive sense.

5.3.2.3. Comrie’s View of the Distinction between Active and Eternal Justification

Does Comrie try to equate the idea of active justification with eternal justification as did

¹⁰⁷ Comrie, Brief, 17. “wij sprekende van de rechtvaardigmakinge, die als een TOTUM, een
geheel aanzien, hetwelk zijne volkomentbeit ontvangt, wanneer alle de deelen, tot het geheel behoorende,
om een geheel eigentlijk daar te stellen, in zijn volkomenheit met elkander zamengevoegt ofte
gcombineert worden.”

¹⁰⁸ According to Kuyper, a mystical way, not an intellectual way, is necessary in order to
integrate each part of justification into a totality. This mystical way, for Kuyper, is union with Christ. See

¹⁰⁹ Kersten also points out that Comrie’s view of eternal justification is not exclusive. See
Brine? The answer is no. Comrie’s view of active justification precludes eternal justification when defined as the completion and finalization of justification in eternity. Comrie’s concept of active justification speaks only of justification from God’s perspective on the basis of God’s eternal decree; this is quite different from eternal justification in the exclusive sense. For Comrie, justification is fully realized not in eternity nor even in active justification but in passive justification in time. Comrie writes:

I still disavow that justification, by an intrinsic act of God in Himself, includes the entire benefit in its perfection. Since, by the intrinsic act of God, nothing is placed outside the Being of God without transferring acts of the executing providence, whereby that, which is in God of all eternity, is gained its effect in time and is placed thereby outside God. . . . Although the [intrinsic] act in itself is so perfect because it is ended as God Himself, no intrinsic act of God . . . has its perfectness before God’s efficiency or actual execution.

In his writings Comrie does dwell on the completeness and absoluteness of God’s decree in eternity more than its execution in time. However, Comrie also says that God’s immanent and intrinsic act, though absolute and perfect, does not exert an effect on the temporal affairs of creatures unless it is effectively applied in time. In this Comrie sees

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110 On Price’s identification between active justification and eternal justification, see Price, “John Calvin and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Justification in Relation to Ethics,” 147.

111 This is also a view of Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633-1698). According to Heidegger, active justification should be distinguished from eternal justification. Heidegger notes: “Neque illa [active justification] propri ab aeterno peragitur, quia Deus decretum justificandi aeternum non ante fidem exequitur; sed in tempore, partim in Coelo, post absolutas in cruce passiones Christi . . . partim in conscientia nostram, simul atque credimus in Christum, & sentential absolutionis velut ad fidem nostram pronuntiatur.” See Johann Heinrich Heidegger, Corpus theologiae christianae (Tiguri, 1732), 2:303 (Loc.XXII, par.79). For van den Honert’s citation about Heidegger, see Comrie, Brief, 59n(a).

112 Comrie, Brief, 88-89. “. . . ik nog ontkenne dat de rechtvaerdigmakinge bij een inblijvende daad God in zig zelven de geheele Weldaad in hare volkomenheit bevat: alzoo door de inblijvende daad God niets buiten het wezen Gods gestelt wordt, zonder overgaande daden der uitwerkende Voorzienigheid, waardoor het geen in Godt van alle eeuwigheid is, zijn effect bekomt in deu tijd, en buiten Godt daargestelt wordt . . . geen inblijvende daad Gods . . . [of]schoon die daad in zig zelven zo volmaakt is als Godt zelve tot dat einde waartoe ze is, hare volkomenheit heeft, voor en aleer Gods efficientie, of dadelijke uitwerkinge.”
the framework of the “decree in eternity and its execution in time.”

Comrie does not see the execution of God’s decree in time as inferior to the decree itself. He says that God’s work *ad extra* (execution) should be based on God’s work *ad intra* (decree) in terms of causality. Comrie thus affirms that “the sole regulation of the act of His will is only grounded in His freedom, sovereign, absolute, and almighty pleasure” as the ultimate purpose of God’s decree.

Unlike Brine, Comrie states that “we by no means confuse it [the dimension of active justification] with God’s predestination or decree of election, [there] being a distinction between [them].” In Brine’s argument active justification, predestination, election, and eternal justification are all regarded as the same idea which is then folded into the immanent act of God in eternity, an act which was already made in eternity. However, while Comrie agrees that these ideas are all included in the intrinsic act of God on the basis of God’s immutable, absolute, and complete nature, they are not all a single idea. Instead, Comrie argues that the idea of active justification is neither about God’s eternal determination regarding election and reprobation (predestination), nor about the

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113 Voetius also guards that the decree and its execution should not be confused, saying that “[a]n decretum justificationis partem aut momentum aliquod faciat in ipsa justificatizatione? Resp. Neg. Neque enim confundi debeat vocatio, regeneratio, justificatio, adoptio aut justificatio, cum decreto; interna actio cum emanante externa; aut geterna cum temporaria; aut decretum seu voluntas Dei cum executione et re volita: quod exemplo decreti executionis; aut decreti salvationis declarari potest; quae ab ipsa creatione, et ab ipsa salute distinguuntur.” See Voetius, *Selectarum disputationum theologicarum* (Utrecht, 1669), 5:281 (Probl. de Justif. Part 1). For van den Honert’s citation about Voetius, see Comrie, *Brief*, 58-59n(a).

114 Comrie, *Brief*, 85. “. . . de eenige bepalinge van zijn wils-daad alleen gegrondt in zijn vrijmagtig, Souverein, volstrekt oppermagtig welbehagen.”

115 Comrie, *Brief*, 83. “. . . verwarren wij die geenzints met Godts Praedestinatie ofte besluit der Verkiezing, zijnde een onderscheidt daar tusschen.”


perfect completion of a sinner’s justification in eternity (eternal justification). Rather, the notion of active justification is about the establishment and announcement of the divine sentence from God’s side regarding a sinner’s justification.\textsuperscript{118}

In sum, Comrie does not confuse the idea of active justification with eternal justification, predestination, or election. Even though these ideas are all included in God’s intrinsic act, their nature and execution are not the same.

5.3.2.4. Causal Language

Just as with definitive sanctification, Comrie’s views on justification can also be understood through his use of causal language. Comrie sees the absoluteness of God’s eternal decree to justify and the corresponding idea of active justification as the “primary and efficient” cause of justification. Comrie’s avid defense of this idea is a key part of his theological reaction to the historical context of his day. Against the views of Socinianism, Arminianism, and neonomianism, all of which leave room for human work or merit to some extent in justification,\textsuperscript{119} through his explanation Comrie asserts that the sinner’s justification is primarily based on the immutable, objective, divine foundation and promise, not on shifting subjective human work. Comrie holds that God and His work is the primary cause of everything.

Comrie also applies this causality to the role of faith in justification. Comrie

\textsuperscript{118} See Comrie, \textit{Brief}, 83.

\textsuperscript{119} Throughout \textit{Brief}, Comrie mentions the view of Socinianism ten times; Arminianism, seventeen times; and neonomianism, seven times.
makes a distinction between the *habitus* (habit) and *actus* (act) of faith. The *habitus* of faith refers to the principle which makes possible believing. The *actus* of faith is the actual human activity of believing. This activity of believing (geloon) should flow out of the habit or principle of faith (geheel). Throughout his discussion of justification, Comrie is careful to guard against any possibility that the *actus* of faith might be confused with the primary or efficient cause of justification. Comrie believes that if the *actus* of faith played a leading role in justification, this would make justification human-merited or human-centered. Comrie uses the concept of “immediate imputation” to push back against the idea that acts of faith must be added to Christ’s righteousness for sinners to be justified. He shows that imputation is not controlled or directed by the *actus* of faith when he says that “as we are only righteous before God in this [immediate] imputed righteousness and satisfaction, so we, having become righteous as ours through imputation from God without our help, also only

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124 The term “immediate imputation” is not referring to *imputatio immediata* in the notion of *imputatio peccati*, namely, the way of how to attribute sinfulness to mankind. Whereas *imputatio mediata* (mediate imputation) refers to the divine attribution of sinfulness to mankind because of hereditary or natural corruption of all people, *imputatio immediata* (immediate imputation) refers to the divine attribution of sinfulness to mankind because of the Fall. See Muller, *Dictionary*, 149 (s.v. *imputatio*). Differently, the term “immediate imputation” here is related with the role of faith in the imputation, namely, whether faith is needed (mediate imputation) or not (immediate imputation) to be imputed.
receive and rest thereon unto salvation” (emphasis added). Comrie says that this imputation occurs “without our help” (zonder ons toedoen) and “without any prior act by us” (zonder enige voorafgaande daad van ons) as well. If active justification did require anything more than the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness, e.g. any human activity or merit, imputation would mean nothing. Even so, it is undeniable that Comrie’s reluctance to make room for actus of faith in justification, no matter how understandable, attenuates to some degree the instrumental role of faith in imputation.

However, Comrie does not totally reject the instrumental cause of faith in his discussion of justification. He holds that justification is understood in a fourfold causal structure: (1) God’s grace (internal prompting cause); (2) Christ’s active and passive obedience (material or meriting cause); (3) immediate imputation (formal cause); and (4) faith (instrumental cause). Faith is needed not in the realm of active justification (the area of the second and third cause as presented right above), but in passive

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125 Comrie, Brief, 101. “. . . gelijk wij in deze toegerekende Gerechtigheid en Genoegdoeninge alleen rechtvaardig voor Godt zijn, wij zoo ook alleen die, als de onse van Godt door toerekeninge zonder ons toedoen geworden zijnde, aannemen, ende daar op ter zaligheit berusten.”

126 See Comrie, Brief, 104.

127 For this reason, Comrie’s view of the role of faith in the imputation has been fairly criticized. For example, Graafland evaluates that Comrie’s view finally weakens the need for actus of faith. See Graafland, “Alexander Comrie (1706-1774),” 338. According to Van den Brink, Comrie’s view, which sees faith not as an instrument of justification in the imputation, bears a striking likeness to the antinomian tenets not in a practical perspective, but in a doctrinal perspective. See Van den Brink, “Comrie en het Antinomianisme,” 133-139; idem, “Elke daad is een werk,” 158; idem, “The Act or Habit of Faith? Alexander Comrie’s Interpretation of Heidelberg Catechism Question 20,” 260-264.


129 For Comrie, the imputation is the important content and sphere of active justification. To explain this, Comrie cites Lucas Trelcatius (1542-1602): “FORMA justificationis, Active sumptae, est Actualis Justitiae Christi, gratuita imputatio; qua meritum & Obedientia Christi nobis applicantur, vi communionis arctissimae, qua ille in nobis, & nos in illo.” See Lucas Trelcatius, Scholastica, et methodica.
justification (the fourth cause). Comrie states that “faith [is] the instrumental cause [instrumenteele oorzaak], through which we only receive this benefit [salvation], appropriate to us, and rest thereon unto beatitude” (emphasis in the original). Comrie elaborates on several different aspects of faith as a means (middel) of justification. There is: (1) a united means (verenigde middel); (2) a keeping means in union with Christ (houdend middel in de vereniging met Christus); (3) a receiving means (ontvangend middel); (4) an accepting means (aannemend middel); (5) a leaning and resting means (leunende en berustende middel), and so forth. Through faith as a means, believers can unite with Christ, retain this union, and rest on the benefit of salvation. In the sphere of passive justification, faith as a means or instrumental cause is necessary, for “this benefit [of justification] has not its perfection, if faith of the elect is not added to it” (emphasis in the original). Still, Comrie firmly believes that faith should not be a primary and efficient or meritorious cause of justification. As he notes:

If one places faith as a preceding habit and act or activity before God by a transferring act and faith justifies us immediately and personally by the imputation of the righteousness and satisfaction of Christ, one changes the whole nature of the causes, making the second the first and the first the second . . . If God justifies us firstly upon or out of or by faith as antecedent, God is no longer the first . . . [But] God is always the first and nothing depends outside of Himself in His works [emphasis in the original].

130 Comrie, Brief, 26. “. . . het geloove als de instrumenteele oorzaak, waar door alleen wij deze weldaad ontvangen, ons toegeeven, en daar op tot zaligheid berusten.”

131 See Comrie, Brief, 151-152.

132 Comrie, Brief, iv. “. . . deze Weldaad hare volkomenheit niet heeft, zoo daar niet bijkome het Geloove der uitverkorenen.”

133 Comrie, Brief, 123-124. “. . . zoo men het geloove als eeuw voorafgaande hebbelijkheid, daadt, offe werkzaamheid stelt, eer Godt ons door een overgaande daadt dadelijk en persoonel regtvaardigt door toereekeninge van de geregteigheid en genoegdoeninge Christi, zoo verandert men de geheele natuur der
For Comrie, the sinner’s justification becomes real and gracious only when it is properly understood in the correct causality. Every secondary cause of justification (e.g., faith, good works, the notion of passive justification, etc.) is based on or aroused as an effect of the primary cause of justification, i.e., God’s grace, the eternal decree, and active justification.

5.4. Summary

This chapter examined Comrie’s discussion of “objectivity and decisiveness,” the second characteristic of definitive sanctification and active justification.

Comrie’s writings on sanctification included a strong resemblance to definitive sanctification. First, he clearly believed that it is unmistakably the beginning point of sanctification. Second, Comrie speaks of who believers are (their identity) in that beginning; third, in what state believers are (condition) in that beginning, and finally what is the basis (foundation or ground) of progressive sanctification in that beginning. Comrie’s ultimate purpose in presenting this perspective on sanctification is to emphasize the objective and decisive dimension as the primary or efficient cause of sanctification.

Comrie’s methodical approach to understanding and reporting on the objective and decisive aspect of salvation carries on into his study of the active dimension of justification. Comrie’s emphasis on the absoluteness of God’s eternal decree to justify has been mischaracterized as an affirmation of justification in eternity. However, he

oirzaken: makende de tweede de eerst, en de eerste de tweede . . . wijl, zoo Godt ons eerst regtvaerdigt op het Geloove, ofte uit ofte door het Geloove, als een voorgaande, hij niet langer de eerst . . . hij altoos de eerste is, en van niets buiten zig in zijne werkinge afhangt . . ."
focuses on active justification as the tool to define the objective and decisive beginning of justification, which he believes is firmly rooted in God’s eternal decree to justify and not in justification from eternity in the exclusive sense. For Comrie, active justification is not identical to justification in eternity, nor with predestination or election *per se*. Instead, a sinner’s justification is completed and terminated only when each part, i.e., justification in eternity, in the resurrection or imputation, and in the conscience, is perfected in the distributive sense and then is perfectly integrated into a whole in the concrete sense. The emphasis on active justification was intended only to secure the objective and decisive ground of justification which had been shaken by several erroneous teachings of his day; Comrie also believed strongly that God and His work have to be the primary and efficient cause of justification.

We examined in Bavinck the first parallel characteristic, the “inseparability” of definitive from passive sanctification and active from passive justification, Chapter 4. The second characteristic, the “objective and decisive” nature of definitive sanctification and active justification, we just treated in Comrie. Now in Witsius we will consider the third parallel characteristic, “Christ-centeredness” in sanctification and justification.
CHAPTER 6
PARALLEL CHARACTERISTIC NO. 3: CHRIST-CENTEREDNESS IN HERMAN WITSIUS

In His matchlessly perfect life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ rises above every other consideration in salvation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the dimensions of active justification and definitive sanctification, for without Christ the foundations on which these stand would be hopelessly shattered. Active justification is the condition of the believer relying entirely on God’s promise, which is only fulfilled in Christ and His righteousness. Definitive sanctification is the condition of the believer sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness only through union with Him. Christ is the intrinsically vital element in both dimensions, so Christ and His work is by far the most significant parallel characteristic we can study.

This chapter will examine Christ-centeredness1 as seen in the soteriology of Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Witsius (1636-1708).2 Witsius’ writings themselves

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1 Here, the term “Christ-centered” is not intended to refer to a kind of “central dogma” or “Christocentric” deduction, which emphasizes Christ and theological Christocentrism by way of excluding other theological loci as the theologies of the nineteenth centuries, e.g., Schleiermacher, Schweizer, Ritschl, Barth, etc. On this issue, see Muller, After Calvin, 94-98. Rather, the term “Christ-centered” here refers to a soteriological Christocentrism, which places Christ and his work at the center of redemption and its profound benefits, e.g., regeneration, justification, sanctification, etc. The proper tendency of the theological Christ-centeredness was not uncommon in the context of the seventeenth century. For example, when Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) discussed on scientia Dei (the knowledge of God), he tried to see scientia Dei under the Christological context in a concrete sense. On this, see Jae-Eun Park, “Stephen Charnock’s Christological Knowledge of God in A Discourse of the Knowledge of God in Christ,” The Confessional Presbyterian 10 (2014): 73-81.

center on Christ’s saving work. In this context, Witsius describes the ideas of justification and sanctification by exploring how Christ fills the mystical “spaces” between definitive and progressive sanctification and between active and passive justification. After briefly looking at Witsius’ theological character in its historical context, we will examine in detail the way in which his concepts of definitive sanctification and active justification focus on Christ. From this analysis we can conclude that: (1) definitive sanctification is the condition or state into which a believer is ushered to share in Christ’s perfect holiness in union with Him; and (2) only Christ’s perfect life, death, and resurrection counts toward the believer’s active justification. These conclusions point to a purely “Christ-centered” salvation.

6.1. Witsius as Theological Arbiter

Witsius himself said that his most well-known works, Animadversiones irenicae ad
controversias (1696)\(^3\) and De oeconomia foederum Dei (1685),\(^4\) were intended to be a moderate and conciliatory approach toward reconciling a series of controversies between English neonomians and antinomians of the seventeenth century. Witsius wrote, “Let us now sacrifice to peace and harmony, after we have provided for the truth.”\(^5\) Most scholars recognize Witsius as an irenic theologian\(^6\) who pursued theological synthesis and arbitration between neonomians (esp., Baxterian Daniel Williams) and antinomians (e.g., Tobias Crisp), and between Voetians and Cocceians.\(^7\) Witsius avoided arguments

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\(^3\) Herman Witsius, Animadversiones irenicae ad controversias (Ultradejecti, 1696). Hereafter this edition will be cited as Animadversiones. Animadversiones has been translated into English by Thomas Bell with notes. See Herman Witsius, Conciliatory, or Irenical Animadversions on the Controversies Agitated in Britain, trans. Thomas Bell (Glasgow, 1807). Hereafter this edition will be cited as Conciliatory. Subsequent quotations will be taken mostly from Bell’s translation, but if necessary, the translation will be modified in consultation with the original Latin text. The original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages.

\(^4\) Herman Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus, libri quatuor (Leeuwarden: J. Hagenaar, 1685). Hereafter this edition will be cited as De oeconomia foederum Dei. De oeconomia foederum Dei has been translated into English by William Crookshank. See Witsius, Economy. Subsequent quotations will be taken mostly from Crookshank’s translation, but if necessary, the translation will be modified in consultation with the original Latin text. The original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages. D. Patrick Ramsey and Joel Beeke’s analysis of Witsius’ The Economy of the Covenants is helpful to overview the whole theological structure of De oeconomia foederum Dei. See Beeke and Ramsey, An Analysis of Herman Witsius’s the Economy.

\(^5\) Witsius, Animadversiones, 134 (X.XI); Conciliatory, 115.


that criticized the “other’s” voice subjectively without a thorough analysis. In his preface to *Animadversiones*, Witsius named three personal difficulties he found in defining the theological differences between neonomians and antinomians: (1) most requests delivered to Witsius for theological analysis contained subtle, nuanced arguments in English, so Witsius had some difficulty grasping their meaning: “I [Witsius] have scarce a tolerable knowledge of your language [English],”\(^8\) (2) Witsius also found the “greatest intricacy”\(^9\) in the often contentious arguments among the theological parties; and (3) Witsius believed that to a certain degree both the neonomians and antinomians “had understood the same thing, but in a different manner of expression.”\(^10\) Already facing the difficulty of deciphering the theological subtleties of the debates, Witsius also had to find ways to avoid being caught up in the generally disputatious discussions. *Animadversiones* and *De oeconomia foederum Dei* are expressions of Witsius’ strong desire not to argue for argument’s sake, but to preserve a balanced objectivity toward the neonomian and antinomian arguments.\(^11\) Witsius accomplished this by relying on a clear presentation of the twofold nature of sanctification and the distinction between active and passive justification.

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\(^8\) Witsius, *Animadversiones*, 6 (prologus); *Conciliatory*, 8 (preface).

\(^9\) Witsius, *Animadversiones*, 6 (prologus); *Conciliatory*, 8 (preface).

\(^10\) Witsius, *Animadversiones*, 7 (prologus); *Conciliatory*, 8 (preface).

\(^11\) One of the reasons why England designated Witsius as an arbitrator of the controversy between neonomians and antinomians is that Witsius’ *De oeconomia foederum Dei* was widely read throughout England at that time. On this, see van den Brink, *Herman Witsius en het Antinomianisme*, 127-128.
6.2. The “Covenant of God with the Elect” in Witsius’ Soteriology

De oeconomia foederum Dei includes four books: the “Covenant of Works,” the “Covenant of Grace,” the “Means of Grace,” and the “Covenant of God with the Elect.” Conventional scholarship has paid the most attention to the covenants of works and grace;12 Witsius’ doctrine of the pactum salutis which appears in Chapters I-III of Book 2, has drawn particular attention.13 The covenant of God in the elect has received relatively little mention,14 but the treatment of justification and sanctification contained in this book of De oeconomia foederum Dei is an important part of this study.

Animadversiones is also important, because in addressing the controversies between neonomians and antinomians Witsius presents a twofold idea that is analogous to the dimensions of definitive and progressive sanctification, and draws a similar distinction between active and passive justification.15 His distinctions are grounded in the ontology

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14 Given that Witsius’ discussion of the covenant of God with the elect is related to soteriological blessings (e.g., election, effectual calling, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, etc.), Fesko also dealt with Witsius’ view of justification, sanctification, and union with Christ. See Fesko, Beyond Calvin, 340-379. Here, Fesko argues that Witsius’ position of justification and sanctification is closer to the so-called doctrinal antinomians rather than the neonomians. On the relationship between Witsius and the English antinomians, see Gerrit A. van den Brink, “Calvin, Witsius (1636-1708), and the English Antinomians,” Church History and Religious Culture 91, no. 1-2 (January 2011): 229-240.

15 For a brief discussion regarding the structure and content of Animadversiones, see Ramsey,
of Christ and His meritorious work, so their essence is quintessentially Christ-centered.

6.3. Witsius’ Soteriological Views

6.3.1. Witsius and Definitive Sanctification

Just as we saw in Bavinck and Comrie in the preceding chapters, Witsius advances an idea that is analogous to definitive sanctification. This section examines how Witsius’ conception corresponds to definitive sanctification in three ways: (1) the conventional twofold, and Witsius’ fourfold definition of sanctification; (2) the believer’s condition “in Christ”; and (3) “evangelical” perfection as an analogy to definitive sanctification.

6.3.1.1. Twofold and Fourfold Sanctification

In *De oeconomia foederum Dei* Witsius comments: “[S]anctification is sometimes held forth as a blessing *from God to man*, 1 Thess. v. 23. ‘And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly;’ [and] sometimes as *man’s duty towards God*, 1 Thess. iv. 3. ‘For this is the will of God, even your sanctification’” (emphasis added).\(^{16}\) Witsius spells out the distinction as follows:

> The former [blessing from God to man] God powerfully works in us, according to the purpose of his gracious decree; the latter [man’s duty towards God] he justly requires of us, by the will of his holy command. When sanctification denotes the first implantation of spiritual habits, it is a mere blessing from God, in procuring what we do not co-operate with him, but receive it from him. As it signifies the activity, or lively exercise of

\(^{16}\) Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.XII.XV (p. 342); *Economy*, 2:7.
infused habits, and their corroboration and progress, so far we are active; but then it is as we are acted upon under God, and dependently on him.  

For Witsius, the “blessing from God to man” focuses on its monergistic nature in the sense that the Holy Spirit first unilaterally sanctifies believers, and then they are passively blessed only on the basis of what God has done beforehand. His conception of “man’s duty” in sanctification involves the human’s sanctifying activity cooperating with and building on God’s initial activity, all the while remembering and believing what God had previously done. Witsius’ objective and unilateral blessing from God to man equates to the notion of definitive sanctification, and his description of man’s continuous collaborative duty is analogous to progressive sanctification. Witsius acknowledges that sanctification starts from the divine side just as portrayed in definitive sanctification, and he marks the blessing of sanctification from God to man as one dimension and man’s duty in sanctification as the other. He does not however imply that there is a sharp divide between them. As did Bavinck, Witsius also emphasizes that “these things [blessing from God to man and man’s duty to God] can never be separated” for man’s duty (progressive sanctification) must always be grounded in the blessing from God to man (definitive sanctification).

Witsius also breaks down sanctification into four dimensions. The first part is

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17 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.XII.XV (p. 342-343); *Economy*, 2:7.

18 For the detailed discussion regarding the inseparable nature between definitive and progressive sanctification, see chapter 4 of this study.

19 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.XII.XV (p. 343); *Economy*, 2:7.

20 Witsius also explained justification in the fourfold causality in *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.XXXIII-XLVII. This will be discussed later in detail.
the “commencement” (*initium*), when “sin is expelled, [and] virtue or holiness is introduced.”

The second part is the “new life” which is brought forward from the first part and acts and works in one’s spiritual life. The third part consists of “mortification” and “vivification”; at the commencement of sanctification, the believer experiences the old man destroyed and the new man revived. Witsius also refers to a fourth part he calls “consummation” (*consummatio*), the “complete sanctification of the whole man.” In this fourfold concept of sanctification the first part is analogous to the notion of definitive sanctification in terms of denoting the beginning point of sanctification; the second and third parts represent progressive sanctification; and the last part is the final glorification when the believer’s sanctification is complete.

Witsius’ view of sanctification is not monolithic but multidimensional. Whether described as twofold or fourfold, the events from the “blessing from God to man” to the “duty of man” or from the “commencement” to the “consummation” of sanctification, are analogous to definitive and progressive sanctification respectively.

6.3.1.2. The New State of Being in Christ

We have already seen both Comrie and Bavinck describe definitive sanctification in terms of the believer’s new “condition” of conforming to and sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness through union with Him. By this they mean that definitive sanctification consists of two things: (1) the condition and (2) being in Christ. Witsius has no argument with this.

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21 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.XII.XLV (p. 351); *Economy*, 2:17.

22 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.XII.XLV (p. 351); *Economy*, 2:18.
view of sanctification.

For Witsius, being “in Christ” is itself the condition. It is a vital way to explain how the sinner enters into and remains in sanctification. Witsius says that “… perfect holiness is required for the right to happiness. In Christ therefore we are righteous and holy, not by our own personal or inherent righteousness and holiness, but by things that are Christ’s” (emphasis added). If believers not united with Christ, their supposed “new life” of being grafted onto Christ would be invalid. “Lest any arrogant mind think that human beings might arrive at the summit of sanctification by virtue of their own endeavors,” Witsius warns, [it is] only by being “in Christ” that the pinnacle may be reached. Witsius expresses forcefully that any human effort toward sanctification that diminishes the meaning of “being in Christ,” is at best misleading and at worst could even be blasphemous. One’s view of sanctification must be completely Christ-centered not human-centered in terms of its merit, origin, and progress. Furthermore, even if sanctification is understood as a spiritual self-examination, believers can only truly examine and prove themselves when they are in Christ. Witsius believes that the sinner’s blemishes and iniquities are definitively removed, not because of their natural

23 Witsius, Animadversiones, 75 (VI.VII); Conciliatory, 70. “. . . sanctitas Christi nostra est; eo adspectu quatenus consummata sanctitas requiritur ad jus beatitudinis. In Christo itaque justi & sancti sumus, non nostra personali aut inhaerente justitia & sanctitate, sed ea quae Christi est . . .”

24 See Witsius, Animadversiones, 73 (VI.IV); Conciliatory, 62-63.

25 “Si quis eo se in virtutis ac sanctimoniae studio profecerit jactaret, ut summum illius apicem non minus quam ipse Christus attigisset, is non mendacii solum & intolerabilis arrogantiae, sed & insaniae & blasphemiae, merito ab omnibus postularetur.” See Witsius, Animadversiones, 76 (VI.IX); Conciliatory, 71.

26 See Witsius, Animadversiones, 207 (XVI.XV); Conciliatory, 171. Here, Witsius mentioned 2 Cor 13:5: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!”
inclination nor by any human effort, but because “these are covered with the most perfect righteousness and holiness of Christ.” 27 This unmistakable state of “being in Christ” reveals itself in two activities: imitating and following. Witsius notes: “[W]e are to distinguish between imitation, whereby we are said to be μιμηταί (imitators) of Christ, 1 Cor. xi. 1; and between following, by which we are commanded to follow Christ” (emphasis in the original). 28 The “former [imitating] denotes a conformity to an example: the latter [following], the attendance of servants, going after their masters.” 29 The state of being “in Christ” requires both the believers’ passivity (receiving the divine conferment) and activity (fulfilling the responsibility) in that Christ first stretches out His hand for union with believers, then they adhere to this union in imitating and following “in Christ.” 30

Second, a believer who is in the state or condition of being “in Christ,” is definitively changed from the position of a slave to sin into that of a chosen and called saint by being conformed to Christ’s perfect holiness. 31 This definitive condition, according to Witsius, occurs within believers when they share in the perfect holiness of Christ the divine exemplar. This definitive condition is a “real act” (actio realis) of God in Christ, which brings a “change of state” (mutatio status) of believers’ quality, habits,

27 Witsius, Animadversiones, 215 (XVI.XIX); Conciliatory, 176.

28 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XC (p. 365); Economy, 2:34.

29 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XC (p. 365); Economy, 2:34.

30 According to Witsius, union with Christ is not just a superficially united event, but the special and unique event that Christ and believers become the “oneness.” See Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.VIII.XXXI (p. 287); Economy, 1:407.

31 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.IX (p. 341); Economy, 2:5.
Commenting on Rom 6, Witsius says that the most important change of state is mortification of the old man, which means “the destruction of the dominion of sin and the purging of corruptions.” Here he elaborates on this condition of mortification:

Our old man is crucified with him [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed; not only some actions and parts of it, but that entire compound, made up of depraved habits, thoughts, lusts, words, and actions; as a body is made up of its members, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Those who are in Christ are definitively dead to sin in every respect (Rom 6:2). Yet Witsius also says that the believer’s definitive condition is not merely negative, i.e. “dead to sin,” but also positive, “This putting off and this mortification of the old man is always accompanied with the putting on, or vivification of the new man, by which are denoted all those qualities wherein the excellency of the divine image is placed” (emphasis in the original). Thus, the definitive state of conforming to Christ’s perfect holiness in union with Christ, is being a new man. There is an unbridgeable gap between the old man and the new man. The new man is not merely different from but is totally contrary to the old man in terms of quality, nature, behavior, and mind.

The definitive condition of being in Christ, which is also the condition of being a new man, is this putting off of the old man and this putting on of the new man. This, Witsius says, is performed by the influx of God’s grace and arises from God’s image in the heart of the believer. The new man is identified with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This process is a radical transformation of the old man, where the dominion of sin is destroyed and the new life in Christ is established.

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32 “Sanctificatio est actio realis, quae peragitur influxu hyperphysico, & cujus terminus est mutatio status quoad qualitatem, tam habituam, quam actionum.” See Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XIII (p. 342); Economy, 2:6.

33 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XXXVIII (p. 346); Economy, 2:12.

34 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XXXVIII (p. 346); Economy, 2:12.

35 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XXXI (p. 347); Economy, 2:12.

36 In this regard, Witsius’ view on “dead to sin” is not idealistic, which would interpret this in a symbolic, theological, and baptismal sense, but realistic, namely, the old man is actually and really crucified and destroyed, as interpreted by Moo, Schreiner, Fitzmyer, Käsemann, Murray, etc. On this, see section 2.3.1.1 of this study.

37 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XLIII (p. 350); Economy, 2:17.
new man and saint, is brought about as a direct result of being conformed to Christ’s perfect holiness. In definitive sanctification believers are passively united with Christ by the imputation of His perfect holiness; in progressive sanctification believers actively live in union with Christ by imitating, following, and sharing in Christ’s perfect holiness. Both forms of union begin with Christ, inasmuch as believers unite with Christ’s perfect holiness, “not by their own virtue or strength, nor by any innate principle of natural life, but by supernatural grace and the virtue of Christ.”

Witsius defines one dimension of sanctification as the believer’s “condition” of being “in Christ, attuned and [in compliance] with Christ’s pattern of perfect holiness.” In this condition the believer is dead to sin and alive as the new man. This condition is brought about solely by things that Christ has, not by anything that believers have either by nature or by human acquisition. Witsius’ Christ-centered definition of the believer’s condition of “being in Christ” is analogous to definitive sanctification.

6.3.1.3. Relation to Perfection or Completion of Sanctification

Referencing Paul, Witsius argues that believers must not be afraid to say that “we are

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38 On the discussion that Christ should be the example and model of the new sanctified man, see Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.XII.XXXII-XXXIII, XLIV (p. 347-348, 350-351); *Economy*, 2:13, 17.


40 Witsius does not try to place believers’ “definitive condition” in the specific stage of the *ordo salutis*. Rather, the nature of this condition, for Witsius, is inclusive and comprehensive in that believers who are called saints are placed in this definitive condition in sharing with Christ’s perfect holiness in union with Christ. Thus, this condition is not just confined in the specific order of the *ordo salutis*, but can be comprehensively applied to believers and their condition which participate in the whole stage of the *ordo salutis*. 
complete in Christ” (Col 2:10). Yet although believers who are in union with Christ are decisively dead to sin, this does not mean that the believers’ definitive condition refers to a totally sinless status in this life. Instead, this means that as HC 60 says in so many words, since God imputes to believers the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, He grants to believers as if they have never had nor ever committed any sin and as if they themselves had accomplished all the obedience which Christ accomplished for them. In other words, believers are perfect and complete in Christ as a result of God passing over (παρεσιν) the sins which they previously committed (Rom 3:25).

Witsius applies the meaning of “perfection” as it is used in Scripture when describing the believers’ definitive condition in Christ. Witsius finds that the word “perfection” has at least five different meanings in Scripture: (1) perfection in sincerity;  

41 Witsius, Animadversiones, 77 (VI.X); Conciliatory, 71. See also Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.CXXV (p. 377); Economy, 2:49. Cf. Col 2:10: “. . . ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι . . . (. . . you have come to fullness in him. . . ).”

42 Cf. HC 60 (from Schaff): “Q: How art thou righteous before God? A: Only by true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, although my conscience accuse me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and that I am still prone always to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.” See also Witsius, Animadversiones, 77-78 (VI.X); Conciliatory, 72.

43 Witsius quoted Chrysostom’s words from Homily, XVII. Rom 10: “Μὴ τοίνυν φοβηθής, φησίν, ὡς τὸν νόμον παραβαίνον, ἐπιείδη τῇ πίστει προσῆλθες· τότε γὰρ αὐτὸν παραβαίνεις, ὅτε δὲ αὐτὸν τῷ Χριστῷ μὴ πιστεύσῃς· ὡς, ἐν πιστεύσῃς αὐτῷ, κἀκεῖνον ἐπλήρωσαις, καὶ πολλῷ πλέον ἢ ἐκέλευσε· πολλῷ γὰρ μείζονα δικαιοσύνην ἐλαβες” (Bell’s translation: “Therefor be not afraid, says he, after thou hast transgressed the law, since thou hast come to the faith: for then thou transgressest it, when by reason of it thou dost not believe in Christ: but if thou believest in him, thou hast also fulfilled it, and much more than it had required: for thou hast received a far greater righteousness.” See Witsius, Animadversiones, 77 (VI.X); Conciliatory, 71-72. Cf. Philip Schaff, ed., Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers: The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, trans. J. B. Morris and W. H. Simcox (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 11:471-486.
(2) perfection in subjective and objective parts; (3) comparative perfection; (4) perfection in degree; and (5) evangelical perfection. The first meaning refers to an unfeigned heart with no hypocrisy (Job 1:1). The second consists of two parts: “subjective” perfection applies to the whole man, i.e., believers are sanctified in spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23), and “objective” perfection applies to the whole law which all must observe (Luke 1:6). The third meaning of perfection refers to the comparison between those who have reached maturity in sanctification versus those who are less mature (1 John 2:12-13). The fourth definition, “authentic” perfection, refers to the sense that the entire law of God is kept without fail and every depraved lust is rooted out. Authentic perfection is impossible to fully obtain in this life. The fifth meaning is an “evangelical” perfection, which is God’s unfathomable grace covering the believer. This perfection cannot be obtained by a human endeavor, but only through absolute obedience and perfect holiness in union with Christ.  

In presenting these five components of the believer’s perfection, Witsius holds that the definitive condition of conforming to Christ’s perfect holiness is nearest to the definition of “evangelical perfection.” The core meaning of evangelical perfection is that Christ in his perfect holiness is the only meritorious and efficient cause of sanctification for believers. In Witsius’ view, evangelical perfection shares the meaning of definitive sanctification that the beginning point of sanctification is Christ, not the

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44 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.CXXIV (p. 376-377); Economy, 2:48-49 (III.XII.CXXV).

45 As shown in chapter 4, Bavinck also talks about the meaning of “evangelical sanctification,” which is similar to Witsius’ notion of “evangelical perfection.” Cf. Bavinck, MD, 544; ORF, 479.
human being.

For Witsius the believer’s conforming to Christ’s perfect holiness does not constitute a sinless state in this life, nor does it equate to sanctification through the believer’s fulfilling the law by their own efforts. Rather, the believer’s sanctification is an “evangelical perfection” which is solely grounded in Christ. This evangelical perfection is also analogous to definitive sanctification.

6.3.1.4. The Christ-Centered and Trinitarian Perspective of Sanctification

Although Witsius’ view of sanctification is significantly tilted toward a Christ-centered perspective its tendency is not exclusively focused on Christ while ignoring or underestimating the work of God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Rather, the believer’s sanctification is a Trinitarian work. Witsius notes: “The Father predestinated us to holiness which Christ purchased for us by his blood and infused into us by the efficacy of the Holy Spirit”46 (emphasis added).

Each person in the Trinity works distinctively according to their unique function and role in the believer’s sanctification. The author and efficient cause of sanctification is no other than God the Father (Ezek 20:12, 1 Thess 5:23, Isa 63:11).47 God is the ultimate starting point of a believer’s sanctification, inasmuch as “[u]ncreated infinite holiness is

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46 Witsius, *Animadversiones*, 215 (XVI.XX); *Conciliatory*, 176-177. “... ea sanctitas ad quam a Patre praedestinati sumus, quam suo nobis sanguine meruit Christus, quaeque nobis infunditur efficacitate Sancti Spiritus ...”

47 “Auctor & Efficiens Sanctificationis Caussa Deus est.” See Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.XII.XLVII (p. 351); *Economy*, 2:18.
the source of that which is created and finite [holiness].”

Witsius also points out that when Scripture speaks of sanctification the Holy Spirit is immediately ascribed as an active agent (2 Thess 2:13 and Titus 3:5). Witsius says that the Holy Spirit renews, and having definitively saved carries on in sanctifying the believer throughout his life. In the sphere of sanctification. Christ’s work is unique and crucial since “the Lord Jesus,” Witsius reasons, “is a most powerful means of sanctification” (emphasis added).

Christ is the effective and powerful means for a believer’s sanctification because only He can mediate between God and human beings. Christ’s mediation in sanctification consists of “imperation” and “application.” First, Christ’s imprecation is related to His incarnation, which actually performs to prove the merit that qualifies him to purchase the believer’s sanctification. Second, Christ’s application means that Christ applies the benefits of imprecation to believers in union with Himself. Through this application believers crucify their “old man” on the cross and revive into the new life by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection. Witsius uses this idea of Christ’s imprecation and application to describe the indispensable means of being given and then owning the sanctified life. Witsius’ perspective on Christ’s unique role in the Trinity as mediator is completely Christ-centered.

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48 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XLVII (p. 351); Economy, 2:18. “Increata, Infinita Sanctitas, creatae & finitae fons.”

49 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XLVIII (p. 352); Economy, 2:18-19.

50 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.CVIII (p. 370); Economy, 2:41 (III.XII.CIX).

51 “Interim & Christo Mediatori hic quoque suae speciales partes sunt, tum quoad imprecationem, tum quoad applicationem.” See Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.XLIX (p. 352); Economy, 2:19.

52 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.XII.L (p. 352-353); Economy, 2:19-20.
Witsius’ Christ-centered perspective of the Trinity in sanctification is displayed in Christ’s unique impetration and application. Christ the God-man acts as mediator in accomplishing the believer’s sanctification.

6.3.2 Witsius and Active Justification

Christ-centeredness is also seen in Witsius’ distinction between active and passive justification. In this section we will examine Witsius’ conception of active justification in three ways: (1) Witsius’ eclecticism; (2) his distinctions; and (3) his Christ-centered perspective. Through these we will see that Witsius’ Christ-centered perspective is inherent in active justification.

6.3.2.1. Witsius’ Eclecticism

Witsius uses an eclectic approach to arbitrate the antinomian and neonomian perspectives on justification. He scrutinizes their theology in light of Scripture, offering objective

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53 In the theological and philosophical context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, eclecticism was not uncommon. This means that no one held completely an exclusive or one-sided argument, which totally excludes a specific aspect of the whole theological or philosophical established aspects. For example, even though Aristotelian philosophy widely prevailed throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this does not mean that Platonic philosophy had completely died out in that time. Rather, there was the unique philosophical tendency to build Platonism in the Reformed perspective, such as Theophilus Gale (1628-1678). On this, see Jae-Eun Park, “Theophilus Gale’s Reformed Platonism: Focusing on His Discourse of ‘Creation’ and ‘Providence’ in The Court of the Gentiles,” Mid-America Journal of Theology 24 (2013): 121-142. For a detailed analysis on the so-called “Christian Aristotelianism” and its relation to eclecticism, see Richard A. Muller, “Reformation, Orthodoxy, ‘Christian Aristotelianism,’ and the Eclecticism of Early Modern Philosophy,” Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis 81, no. 3 (2001): 306-325. The core policy of eclecticism in the Reformed orthodoxy is to evaluate a certain theological or philosophical dimension in light of Scripture and then decide whether it is acceptable or not. In Witsius’ case, the antinomian and neonomian perspectives on justification are criticized, rejected, or accepted in light of Scripture under the eclectic manner.
criticism but still approving of their arguments when they are in line with scriptural truth. For example, in discussing whether the elect are united with Christ before or after faith, Witsius does not answer it as an “either or”; his response secures both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation. Focusing his response on the role of Christ, he describes a distinction between a “true and real” and a “mutual” union:

By a true and a real union, which is only passive on their part, they [the elect] are united to Christ when his Spirit first takes possession of them, and infuses into them a principle of new life. Since faith is an act flowing from the principle of spiritual life, it is plain, that in a sound sense, it may be said, an elect person is truly and really united to Christ before actual faith. By the mutual union, which, on the part of an elect person, is likewise active and operative, whereby the soul draws near to Christ, joins itself to him, applies, and in a becoming and proper manner closes with him without any distraction, is made by faith only. This is followed in order by the other benefits of the covenant of grace, justification, peace, adoption, sealing, perseverance, etc.

Witsius disagrees with both the neonomian and antinomian perspectives on justification.

He points out the problem with neonomianism: “[H]e [Daniel Williams] perhaps chooses to call faith a condition of justification; while I consider it as an instrument” (emphasis in

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54 With regard to Witsius’ attitude, while Ramsey thinks that Witsius stands on the balanced ground between antinomianism and neonomianism under the guidance of scriptural truth, Fesko and van den Brink consider that Witsius’ theological position tends to be close to the so-called “doctrinal antinomianism” in the sense that since the argument that justification precedes faith is accepted by Witsius, this inevitably leads to undermining human responsibility in the arena of salvation. Cf. Ramsey, “Meet Me in the Middle,” 144-148; Fesko, Beyond Calvin, 378-379; van den Brink, “Calvin, Witsius (1636-1708), and the English Antinomians,” passim. Yet, it needs to be noted that Witsius’ usage of the distinction between active and passive justification is his effort to stay away from both antinomian and neonomian errors.

55 Witsius, Animadversiones, 72-73 (VI.III-IV); Conciliatory, 68. “Vera & reali unione, sed quae ab ipsorum parte duntaxat passiva est, uniuntur Christo, quando Spiritus Christi eos primum occupat, & novae vitae principium infundit . . . quum fides sit actus ex principio spiritualis vitae emanans, palam est, sano sensu dici posse, quod homo electus vere & realiter Christo unitus sit ante actualem fidem. . . . At mutua unio, quae ab hominis electi parte quoque actua & operosa est, qua anima ad Christum accedit, ei se adjungit, applicat, ac deceter & apte adhaerescit absque ulla distractione, ea demum per fidem sit. Atque hanc ordine consequuntur caetera foederis gratiae sic bona, Justificatio, Pax, Adoptio, Obsignatio, Conservatio &c.”
the original). Witsius reasons that even though believers are justified by faith, this justification is never obtained by any worth or merit of faith on their part, nor by causality or condition of faiths as the neonomians argued. Witsius asserts that believers are justified when through faith they are acknowledged and receive merit which can only come from the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness. Witsius finds that the neonomian error lies in its weakening of the power of Christ’s imputation by relying on human works or merit.

Witsius also criticizes the antinomian belief that God no longer sees sin at all in justified people. Witsius writes, “God does not altogether forget sin: for nothing slips out of his knowledge or memory. . . . That forgetfulness is not natural, but legal. God is not ignorant of the fact; but he removes the punishment and the fear of punishment.” Here Witsius asserts that God remembers ongoing sin in the justified because as already seen in Burgess, Rutherford, and Bakewell, “He remembers as a father to chastise, not as a judge to condemn.” God sees sin “with anger and wrath, not the wrath of a rigid and a

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56 Witsius, Animadversiones, 139 (X.XII); Conciliatory, 118 (X.XIII, paginated by a wrong number, 108).

57 Witsius, Animadversiones, 138-139 (X.XII); Conciliatory, 117-118 (X.XIII).

58 Witsius, Animadversiones, 165 (XIII.XIII); Conciliatory, 137-138. Here, Witsius directly quoted the words of Charnock, which appears in A Discourse of the Pardon of Sin (Ps 32:1-2). Cf. “That God will not exact the debt of thee. God doth not absolutely forget sin, for what he knows never slips out of his knowledge. So that his not remembering is rather an act of his will than a defect in his understanding. As when an act of oblivion is passed, the fact committed is not physically forgotten, but legally, because the fear of punishment is removed. God puts them out of the memory of his wrath, though not out of the memory of his knowledge.” See Stephen Charnock, “A Discourse of the Pardon of Sin,” in The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock (Edinburgh, 1864), 5:436.

59 For a detailed analysis on Burgess, Rutherford, and Bakewell’s response to Eaton’s antinomian argument regarding sin, see section 3.4.2.2 of this study.

60 Witsius, Animadversiones, 165 (XIII.XIII); Conciliatory, 138.
condemning judge, but of a holy and an angry father.”61 Thus Witsius argues against the idea that “the justified have no need of grief, repentance, confession, and prayers in order to obtain the pardon of sins, which are of daily infirmity,”62 for this would undermine human responsibility. Those who are justified by God’s grace can only respond with grateful penitence and obedience.

In seeking to rationalize the neonomian and antinomian positions while correcting their errors, Witsius employs the distinction between active and passive justification. He hopes his readers will see as proper the theological integration of the antinomian idea of “justification before faith” with the neonomian concept of “conditionality of faith.” Witsius does not throw out justification before faith entirely but equates it to the dimension of active justification, rejecting the idea that human faith or effort or merit by itself could justify the believer.63

6.3.2.2. Witsius’ Distinctions in Justification

In De oeconomia foederum Dei, Witsius introduces three distinctions in order to clarify his theology of justification. First, Witsius describes the conventional distinction between active and passive justification:

The distinction between active and passive justification is well known. The former is that sentence of God, by which he declares his having received

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61 Witsius, Animadversiones, 165-166 (XIII.XIV); Conciliatory, 138. “Videt etiam cum ira & excandescentia, non rigidi & condemna|turi judicis, sed sancti & indignantis Patris.”

62 Witsius, Animadversiones, 169 (XIII.XVIII); Conciliatory, 141.

63 In Animadversiones, Witsius did not explicitely speak of the distinction between active and passive justification. Instead, in De oeconomia foederum Dei, Witsius dealt with the distinction in a more detailed manner. See Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, II.VII.XVI (p. 162-163); Economy, 1:248.
satisfaction from Christ, and pronounces that all the elect are made free from guilt and obligation to punishment, even before their faith, so far as never to exact of them any payment. The latter is the acknowledgment and sense of that most sweet sentence, intimated to the conscience by the Holy Spirit, and fiducially apprehended by each of the elect. The one precedes faith, at least as to that general article which we just proposed; the other follows it [emphasis in the original].

For Witsius, active justification is God’s declaration and sovereign decision to unequivocally and unilaterally justify sinners, but only through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to them prior to the subjective exercise of human faith; this equates to “objective” justification. Passive justification is the sinner’s acknowledgement and acceptance by faith that they are justified solely on the basis of God’s declaration and promise; this is “subjective” justification. William Crookshank, who translated De oeconomia foederum Dei into English, appended a footnote citing alternate names for active and passive justification, i.e., decretive or virtual justification and actual justification respectively. Crookshank wrote that decretive or virtual (active) justification references God’s eternal decree and purpose but is not executed until these dimensions are applied to the individual believer. Actual (passive) justification signifies that justification is realized through faith in the efficacy of active justification.

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64 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, II.VII.XVI (p.162-163); Economy, 1:248. “Nota est distinctio inter justificationem activam & passivam. Illa, est sentential illa Dei, qua sibi per Christum satisfactum profitetur, omnesque electos a reatu & solvendi debito immunes pronuntiat, etiam ante ipsorum fidel. Hac, est agnitione & sensu dulcissimae illius sententiae, per Spiritum Sanctum cordi intimatae, & a quoque electorum fiducialiter apprehensae. Altera fidem praecedat, saltem quoad istum, quem mox proposuimus, generalem articulum; altera sequitur.”

65 “Others distinguish the justification of the elect, into that which is decretive, virtual and actual. The first is God’s eternal purpose to justify sinners in time, by the righteousness of Christ; but God’s eternal purpose to justify the elect is one thing, and the execution of it another. There was also a virtual justification upon Christ’s having made satisfaction; and justification is actual when the elect sinner is enabled to believe in the Son of God, and by faith is united to him” (emphasis in the original). See Witsius, Economy, 1:248n*. 
The second distinction or “article”\textsuperscript{66} that Witsius employs is the distinction between a “general” and “particular” sentence.\textsuperscript{67} The general sentence is the first Gospel promise and God’s declaration that in His eternal counsel and decree, God had purposed to justify the ungodly but only through Christ’s surety. The general sentence is not confirmed until Christ’s satisfaction and payment is fully made.\textsuperscript{68} Meanwhile, the particular sentence is an application of the general sentence to the individual believer. The particular sentence is proclaimed in the elect who are justified through faith by virtue of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. The distinction between general and particular sentences bears a strong resemblance to the distinction between active and passive justification.

The third distinction is between justification in foro coeli (in the court of heaven) and in foro conscientiae (in the court of conscience).\textsuperscript{69} Witsius notes: “[T]hat sentence of God, which was pronounced in the court of heaven [in foro coeli], is intimated and insinuated to the conscience by the Holy Spirit; so that the believer knows, feels, and

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[66] Witsius used the term “article” when he explained several distinctions. Crookshank’s note: “The word articulus is of various significations; but it is plain from the sequel, that the author [Witsius] here uses it for a moment or period, so that he here gives us a very distinct account of the Time of justification” (emphasis in the original). See Witsius, \textit{Economy}, 1:248n+.
\item[67] The distinction between general and particular sentence also can be found in Rijssen’s \textit{Summa theologiae}, 14.7 (p.186).
\item[68] Witsius, \textit{De oeconomia foederum Dei}, III.VIII.LVII-LVIII (p. 296-297); \textit{Economy}, 1:419-420. See also Fesko’s analysis on this, see Fesko, \textit{Beyond Calvin}, 352-354. Witsius endorses the traditional formulation “decreed in eternity and its execution in time.” See Witsius, \textit{Animadversiones}, 61-64 (V.II); Conciliatory, 60-61. Elsewhere Witsius speaks of the formulation “promise and its execution” as the idea of “decreed in eternity and its execution in time.” See Witsius, \textit{De oeconomia foederum Dei}, III.I.XIV (p.196); \textit{Economy}, 1:290-291.
\item[69] As already examined in chapter 3 of this study, the distinction between in foro Dei (or coeli) and in foro conscientiae was common in the theological context of the seventeenth century. Cf. William Twisse, \textit{Vindiciae Gratiae}, 2.4.4 (p. 79).
\end{footnotesize}
experiences that his own sins are forgiven.”

However, the individual aspects of these pairs do not operate apart from one another. Believers are not justified exclusively by active justification, general sentence, or justification in foro coeli. Rather, believers are justified in a synthesis in that “the sinner, being actively and passively justified, is admitted to familiar converse with God and to the mutual participation of the most delightful friendship [with God]” (emphasis in the original). That is to say, only when people are justified actively [from God’s side] and passively [from humanity’s side] can they have an authentic relationship as a friend of God.

6.3.2.3. Christ-Centered Active Justification

Witsius’ active justification and its equivalent general sentence and justification in foro coeli are plainly Christ-centered. In active justification, God “declares His having received satisfaction from Christ and pronounces that all the elect are made free from guilt and obligation to punishment” (emphasis added). In the general sentence, the first Gospel promise will be fulfilled through Christ’s suretyship. In the covenant with the elect, Satan is surely condemned and sinners’ debts are surely written off. In the court

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70 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.LX (p. 297); *Economy*, 1:421. “... sentential illa Dei pronunciata in foro coeli, intimatur, & insinuator conscientiae per Spiritum Sanctum; ita ut fidelis sciat, sentiat, experiatur, remissa sibi peccata sua esse.”

71 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.LXI (p. 298); *Economy*, 1:421. “... peccator active & passive justificatus, admittitur ad familiar Dei commercium, mutuumque jucundissimae amicitiae confortium.”

72 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.VII.XVI (p. 162); *Economy*, 1:248.

73 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.LVII (p. 296); *Economy*, 1:420.
of heaven \textit{[in foro coeli]} or in the court of God \textit{[in foro Dei]}, the Christ-centeredness of active justification is proclaimed. Without Christ and his work, all these ideas—active justification, general sentence, and justification \textit{in foro coeli}—lose their meaning and purpose.

Witsius’ attention to Christ credits the whole merit of justification to Christ himself. He strongly affirms that if justification requires the full remission of sins, the Gospel depends entirely on the satisfaction and merit of Christ.\textsuperscript{74} In order to emphasize that Christ and His work are at the center of justification, Witsius focuses on \textit{who} Christ is:

\begin{quote}
The [Jesus Christ] is called ‘the righteous or just servant of God,’ Isa. liii. 11. Not only as holy and without sin in himself, but as one who had also fulfilled all that righteousness to which he bound himself by his voluntary engagement, whereby, tho’ he was the son, yet he became the servant of God, and by his resurrection was declared to have performed the whole, and so was exalted to that state, that he might be able to justify many, or procure righteousness for many, by virtue of his own righteousness.\textsuperscript{75} 
\end{quote}

Jesus Christ is \textit{the} justified one who solely possesses perfect righteousness by virtue of

\textsuperscript{74} Witsius, \textit{Animadversiones}, 171-173 (XIII.XX); \textit{Conciliatory}, 143.

\textsuperscript{75} Witsius, \textit{De oeconomia foederum Dei}, III.VIII.IV (p. 278); \textit{Economy}, 1:396.
His perfect atonement.\textsuperscript{76} In Christ’s mediation and suretyship\textsuperscript{77} He imputes His own perfect righteousness to sinners. “[The] inherent righteousness [\textit{justitia inhaerens}], which can be brought from human efforts and works is not the foundation of justification from its own worthiness.”\textsuperscript{78} Rather, \textit{only} Christ’s righteousness (\textit{justitia Christi}) is the foundation and groundwork of justification (Gen 22:18, Eph 1:3, and Rom 8:17).\textsuperscript{79} Witsius explains the meaning of Rom 3:24—all are freely justified (\textit{δωρεὰν}) by God’s grace\textsuperscript{80}—that “in respect of God it is of \textit{pure grace}, which as we just said, admits of no partnership with our works. In respect of us, it is \textit{freely}, without anything in us as the

\textsuperscript{76} In the scholarly field on the doctrine of atonement, the so-called “non-violent atonement” has received attention. This perspective argues that a kind of violent image evidently exists in the penal substitutionary atonement, inasmuch as Jesus Christ \textit{had to} die miserably on the cross according to God the Father’s will and plan. Thus, this perspective insists that any kind of violent image should be removed from the Christian doctrine of atonement. One of the radical versions of this perspective is a “Divine Child Abuse” theme, which is argued by a Feminist theologian, Joanne Carlson Brown. According to Brown, the doctrine of penal substitution shows the bloody image that the feeble son Jesus Christ was brutally sacrificed and abused on the cross because of a tyrannical and despotic father’s will. See Joanne Carlson Brown, “Divine Child Abuse?” \textit{Daughters of Sarah} 18 (Summer 1992): 24-28; Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, \textit{Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique} (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989). However, the “Divine Child Abuse” theme can be readily criticized when considering Christ’s “intentionality” in that Christ’s cross was completely a voluntary act and Christ was a subject, not an object of the cross event under the covenant and the \textit{pactum salutis}. Witsius also paid attention to Christ’s “voluntary engagement” when he explained Christ’s satisfaction as the ground of justification. On criticism to the “non-violent atonement,” see Margo G. Houts, “Atonement and Abuse: An Alternate View,” \textit{Daughters of Sarah} 18 (Summer 1992): 29-32; John R. W. Stott, \textit{The Cross of Christ} (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986); Richard J. Mouw, “Violence and the Atonement,” in \textit{Must Christianity Be Violent?: Reflections on History, Practice, and Theology}, eds. Kenneth R. Chase and Alan Jacobs (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 159-182.

\textsuperscript{77} On Christ’s suretyship, see Witsius, \textit{De oeconomia foederum Dei}, II.V.IV (p. 134); \textit{Economy}, 1:208-209.

\textsuperscript{78} Witsius, \textit{De oeconomia foederum Dei}, III.VIII.XXIV (p. 285); \textit{Economy}, 1:404. See also Witsius, \textit{De oeconomia foederum Dei}, III.VIII.LXV (p.299); \textit{Economy}, 1:422.

\textsuperscript{79} Witsius, \textit{De oeconomia foederum Dei}, III.VIII.LXVI (p. 299); \textit{Economy}, 1:423.

\textsuperscript{80} NRSV translates \textit{δωρεὰν} into “as a gift” rather than “freely,” namely, “they are now justified by his grace as a gift.”
cause of it” (emphasis in the original). Here, Witsius’ emphasis on “free” justification does not carry the antinomian idea of free justification that excludes any human role (specifically faith) in justification, overemphasizing God’s free grace as opposed to the Arminian’s overstressing man’s duty. Rather, Witsius’ view of “free” justification confirms that (1) in active justification, human works and righteousness cannot contribute anything in the tribunal of God; (2) only God Himself “justifies sinners, that is, acquits them from sin and from being liable to eternal death, and adjudges them a right to eternal life” (emphasis in the original); (3) the sinners’ debt is removed and they are finally made just and righteous solely through Christ’s perfect righteousness imputed to them; and (4) faith is “the MEAN by which we receive the righteousness of Christ, and justification depending thereon is FAITH and that ONLY” (capitalization in the original). Thus, Witsius emphasizes free justification and Christ-centered justification as both speaking to the same issue that sinners are by no means justified by their own ability or capacity, but solely by Christ’s meritorious work, which is promised in active justification.

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81 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.XLI (p. 290); *Economy*, 1:411.

82 On the antinomian error regarding “free justification,” see Eaton’s argument in section 3.4.2.2 of this study.

83 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.LIV (p. 295-296); *Economy*, 1:418.

84 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.XXVIII (p. 286); *Economy*, 1:406.

85 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.XXX (p. 287); *Economy*, 1:406-407.

86 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, III.VIII.XLVII (p. 292); *Economy*, 1:413. “MEDIUM, quo justitiam Christi, & justitiationem ex ea pendentem, accipimus, FIDES est, & quidem SOLA.” For Witsius’ perspective on faith in salvation in detail, see Herman Witsius, *A Treatise on Christian Faith*, trans. Madan (London: E. Dilly, 1761). This is an extracted and translated version from Witsius’ Latin work on the subject of faith by Rev. Madan. Here Witsius argued that faith is needed for union with Christ, justification, sanctification, etc.
6.4. Foundation of Witsius’ Christ-Centered Soteriology

Witsius provides five grounds for his Christ-centered justification and sanctification: first, the covenant of grace; second, the pactum salutis; third, Christ’s suretyship; fourth, the actuality of Christ’s satisfaction; and fifth, a Trinitarian formula. These five ideas give Witsius’ Christ-centered soteriology its solid foundation.

First, Witsius’ Christ-centered view of God’s promise to give sanctification and justification to believers is grounded in the covenant of grace. As Witsius defines it:

*The covenant of grace is a compact [conventio] between God and the elect Sinner; God on his part declaring his free good-will concerning eternal salvation, and everything relative thereto, freely to be given to those in covenant by and for the Mediator Christ; and man on his part consenting to that good-will by a sincere faith [emphasis in the original].*

The Gospel is deeply rooted in the covenant of grace which was made by God with His good will; salvation is freely conferred through the person and work of Christ the Mediator. Thus the believer’s justification and sanctification is the Christ-centered fruit of the covenant of grace.

Second, Witsius’ Christ-centered view is firmly grounded in the pactum salutis. He argues that believers procure salvation and all its benefits through the wonderful compact between Father and Son. This miraculous agreement is “the will of the Father,

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87 Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.I.V (p. 102); Economy, 1:169. “Foedus gratiae est conventio inter Deum & electum Peccatorem, Deo declarante liberum beneplacitum suum de salute aeterna, omnibusque eo pertinentibus; foederatis gratis dandis, per & propter Mediatorem Christum: homine autem per sinceram fidem beneplacito illi astipulante.”

88 Witsius, *Animadversiones*, 175 (XIV.III); *Conciliatory*, 146. Here, Witsius insists that although there is a controversy of whether believers actually participate in the covenant of grace in a direct sense or only Christ as the representative head of all the elect undertakes all covenantal works, one thing that both parties agree with is that a believer’s salvation is procured by the pactum salutis: “In eo, nisi
giving the Son to be the Head and Redeemer of the elect; and the will of the Son, presenting Himself as a sponsor or suretyship for them."\(^89\) The covenant of grace, Witsius reasons, consists of two agreements: first the pact between God the Father and Christ (the *pactum salutis*) and second the covenant between God and the elect. Witsius believes that God’s immutable promise giving salvation and its benefits to believers is more closely related to the first, stating that “the former agreement is between *God* and the *Mediator*: the latter, between *God* and the *elect*. This last presupposes the first, and is founded upon it."\(^90\) According to Witsius, without the *pactum salutis* the covenant between God and the elect is not effective.

Third, a basis for Witsius’ Christ-centered view of justification and sanctification is Christ’s suretyship. Witsius explains categorically why only Christ can be the mediator and suretyship for believers: Jesus Christ alone has a perfect life to offer up for believers, is the God-man, has an infinite degree of love for us, and through the hypostatic union of the divine and human is able to accomplish the greatest work that anyone has ever attempted.\(^91\) Under Christ’s suretyship He “has offered himself in order to accomplish the will of God, by which we are sanctified, Heb. x. 10."\(^92\)

\(^89\) Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.II.II (p. 103); *Economy*, 1:169.

\(^90\) Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.II.I (p. 103); *Economy*, 1:169.

\(^91\) Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.V.IV (p. 134); *Economy*, 1:208-209.

\(^92\) Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.V.III (p. 133); *Economy*, 1:208, “... Christum se obtulisse, ut perficeret voluntatem illam Dei, per quam sanctificamur. Heb. 10. 10. ...”
Fourth, Witsius’ Christ-centered justification and sanctification is based on the *actuality* of Christ’s satisfaction. Witsius maintains that “the Lord Jesus obtained for the *elect*, by his satisfaction, *an immunity from all misery*, and *a right to eternal life*, to be applied unto them in effectual calling, regeneration, sanctification, conservation, and glorification” (emphasis in the original). ⁹³ In order to confer these soteriological benefits to believers, the effect of Christ’s satisfaction must be actual and real, not just possible or hypothetical. Witsius writes, “[T]he effect of Christ’s satisfaction was not a bare *possibility of the remission* of our sins, and of our reconciliation with God, but an actual *remission* and *reconciliation*, an abolition of the dominion of sin, and finally salvation itself” (emphasis in the original). ⁹⁴ According to Witsius, the theology of Arminius errs in arguing that Christ’s satisfaction brings about the impetration (*impetratio*) of remission of sins rather than the actual remission of sins. ⁹⁵ Witsius says that “this assertion of Arminius is inconsistent with theological truth. For the Scripture nowhere declares that the fruit of Christ’s death is a *possibility* of the remission of sins.” ⁹⁶ (emphasis added). Witsius believes that if the actuality of Christ’s satisfaction is not assured, believers’ soteriological benefits will also not be realized or even attainable.

Fifth and finally, Witsius’ Christ-centered view of salvation is fundamentally

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⁹³ Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.VII.III (p. 155); *Economy*, 1:239. “*Electis impetravit D. Jesus satisfactione sua immunitatem ab omni miseria, & jus ad vitam aeternam*, applicanda ipsis in Vocatione efficaci, Regeneratione, Sanctificatione, Conservatione, Glorificatione.”

⁹⁴ Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.VII.III (p. 155); *Economy*, 1:239. “*... effectum satisfactionis Christi non esse nudam possibilitatem remissionis* peccatorum nostrorum & reconciliationis nostri cum Deo, sed *remissionem & reconciliationem actualem, abolitionem dominii peccati, & denique salutem ipsam* . . .”

⁹⁵ Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.VII.X (p. 158-159); *Economy*, 1:243-244.

⁹⁶ Witsius, *De oeconomia foederum Dei*, II.VII.XIII (p. 160); *Economy*, 1:245.
grounded in the work of the Trinity. In explaining the covenant of God with the elect, Witsius writes:

The Economy of the Persons of the Trinity in the covenant of grace claims also our attention. The Father is held forth as the principal Author of it, “who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself,” 2 Cor. v. 19. and appointed the elect to be heirs of himself, and joint heirs with his Son, Rom. viii. 17. The Son is not only Mediator, and executor of the Covenant, but is himself also the Testator, who by his death ratified the testament of grace, Luke xxii. 29. Heb. ix. 16 and the distributer of all the blessings of it. “I give unto them eternal life,” John x. 28. The Spirit brings the elect to Christ and in Christ to the possession of the benefits of the covenant, intimates to their consciences the holy pledges, the sure mercies of David, and is the seal and earnest of their complete happiness, 1 Cor. xii. 3, 11, 13. Eph. i. 13, 14 [emphasis in the original].

Witsius maintains that no person in the Trinity can be underestimated or ignored in the doctrine of salvation because the covenant of God with the elect is performed by the participation of each Person in the Trinity. That said, Christ’s work is unique in the sphere of salvation, for the material cause of justification is no other than Christ’s perfect righteousness, and the effect of sanctification is the believer’s imitating and following Christ’s perfect pattern of holiness. In Witsius’ thinking, Trinitarian participation in Christ-centered salvation does not contradict; rather, the latter performs on the basis of the former.

Thus Witsius establishes solid theological foundations for his Christ-centered view of justification and sanctification. From the covenant of grace and pactum salutis,

97 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.I.IV (p. 102); Economy, 1:286-287.

98 “Res illa, propter quam justificamur, quam nonnulli MATERIAM justificationis nostrae vocant, est sola perfecta Christi justitia” (capitalization in the original). See Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.VIII.XXXVII (p. 288); Economy, 1:489.

99 Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, II.V.X (p.136-137); Economy, 1:212. See also Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei, III.I.II (p. 192-193); Economy, 1:285-286.
Christ’s suretyship and the Trinitarian participation, Christ’s satisfaction is actualized and realized.

6.5. Summary

This chapter examined the third parallel characteristic of Christ-centeredness in active justification and definitive sanctification through the writings of Herman Witsius. He shows that justification and sanctification cannot be considered at all apart from Christ and His work.

Witsius’ “blessing from God to man” and the “commencement of sanctification” is similar to definitive sanctification. These ideas demonstrate that the beginning point of sanctification does not belong to the human, but to the divine. According to Witsius, those who are called saints are in a “definitive condition” of sharing in and conforming to Christ’s perfect holiness in union with Christ. This definitive condition does not convey the idea of a state of sinlessness, but to the “evangelical perfection” where Christ’s perfect holiness alone provides the credit and merit for the believer’s holiness. Witsius’ analogies to definitive sanctification are entirely Christ-centered.

Witsius describes three pairs of dimensions to explain justification: active and passive justification, general and particular sentence, and justification in foro coeli and in foro conscientiae. The ideas of “general sentence” and “justification in foro coeli” strongly resemble the idea of active justification. Active justification and its analogous ideas are firmly grounded on the covenant of grace, the pacutim salutis, Christ’s suretyship, and the actuality of Christ’s satisfaction. By citing Christ’s satisfaction and
imputation as the only way for believers to be justified, Witsius shows that salvation is entirely Christ-centered. The credit and merit of justification belongs to none other than Christ alone.

Although Witsius’ concept of active justification and definitive sanctification is entirely Christ-centered, this does not exclude Trinitarian participation. On the contrary, Christ’s role as mediator and surety comes to the fore in explaining the Father’s ability and willingness to justify and the Holy Spirit’s ability and willingness to sanctify.
CHAPTER 7

PARALLEL CHARACTERISTIC NO. 4:
GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IN SALVATION IN ABRAHAM KUYPER

The inseparability of active and passive justification and of definitive and progressive sanctification, the objective and decisive nature of active justification and definitive sanctification, and the Christ-centeredness of every dimension of salvation, all rest under the umbrella of God’s salvific sovereignty; these characteristics certainly affirm the principle that salvation is ultimately God-driven. Still, it is in God’s sovereign rule itself that we see most clearly God as the unmistakable Author and Agent of both justification and sanctification.

This chapter will examine this fourth parallel throughout the writings of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). More than any other topic, Kuyper’s main interest is to proclaim God’s absolute sovereignty over every aspect of salvation. After touching on the “zeitgeist” rampant during Kuyper’s era, we will discuss how in opposition to the spirit of his time which attempted to move human sovereignty into first place, Kuyper’s perspective on the distinction between active and passive justification as well as the

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concept of definitive sanctification centers on the fundamental truth that the sinner’s righteousness and holiness are entirely supervised by God.

7.1. Kuyper against Human-centered Ideas

7.1.1. Mixed opinions of Kuyper

In order to understand Kuyper’s soteriology properly, we must first examine the zeitgeist of his times since Kuyper reacted strongly against the spirit of his age.2 As Bolt points out, Kuyper actively struggled with the “principle” or “life system” he labeled modernism. In contemporary terms modernism can be recognized theologically as “liberalism,” intellectually as “free individualism,” religiously as “anthrocentric,” and philosophically as “rationalism” or “romanticism.”7 As James Bratt points out, these

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7 Praamsma, Let Christ Be King, 21-27; Lagerway, “The History of Calvinism in the Netherlands,” 86-87. The term “romanticism” is not a simple word to define. Sometimes the term is understood as a negative value in a religious-philosophical sense that human being or human self or feeling is occupied in a high place rather than any others, or the uniqueness of individuality is emphasized in unity of totality (such as Friedrich Schleiermacher’s thought). Sometimes the term is understood as a neutral
“modern” ideas did not develop independently from one another but were mixed and blended so that the intellectual idea of modernism emerged all through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kuyper was an aggressive opponent of all of these “modern” permutations.

Kuyper’s attitude toward and relationship with modernism has been appraised in different ways. Some are of the opinion that Kuyper did not stand up to modern ideas or principles and his intellectual and philosophical reasoning was eventually overwhelmed by the modern spirit. Cornelis Pronk says that Kuyper is substantially “speculative” and “idealistic” due to the influence of modern philosophy. W. H. Velema also criticizes the idealism and romanticism that he says are embodied in Kuyper’s writings, referring specifically to the “pitfalls” of Kuyper’s thought. Johannes Stellingwerf also examined value when this is grasped under the context of literature or rhetoric structure. Meanwhile, the term is understood as a positive value in terms of seeking an individual’s truth and beauty in unity or enjoying making an antithesis as the coincidentia oppositorum (Cf. Jan de Bruijn, “Abraham Kuyper as a Romantic,” in Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Work, eds. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 42-52). Romanticism is a huge philosophical idea, which is embedded throughout works in the nineteenth century. For example, Schleiermacher’s soteriology can be expressed as a romanticized soteriology due to its deep association with romanticism. On this, see Jae-Eun Park, “Schleiermacher’s Perspective on Redemption: A Fulfillment of the coincidentia oppositorum between the Finite and the Infinite in Participation with Christ,” Journal of Reformed Theology 9, no. 3 (2015): 270-294. For a general analysis on romanticism, see Oskar F. Walzel, German Romanticism, trans. Alma Elise Lussky (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1932).


the intellectual kinship between Kuyper’s thinking and romanticism.¹¹

However, others think that Kuyper was successful in standing against modernism and secularism. According to Rex Ambler, by emphasizing God’s sovereignty as the first principle of everything, Kuyper overcomes not only the spirit of the French Revolution (“Liberté, égalité, fraternité”),¹² but also theological liberalism which was pressed by Profs. Scholten, Kuenen, Rauwennof et al., his teachers at Leiden University.¹³ According to Ronald Rewerts, like Barth in Germany and Forsyth in England, Kuyper in the Netherlands was a “watchman” who successfully resisted modernism and secularism.¹⁴ Edward Ericson also regards Kuyper not as a “modern” man, but as a traditionalist who maintained a negative opinion of romanticism amid the Enlightenment.¹⁵ Others including M. Langley, S. Volbeda, H. Beets et al. even write about Kuyper in uncritical and laudatory terms.¹⁶

However, the subjective criterion of Kuyper’s success or failure in opposing

¹¹ Johannes Stellingwerff, Dr. Abraham Kuyper en de Vrije Universiteit (Kampen: Kok, 1987), esp., 253-282.


modernism is an oversimplification of the impact of his thinking for two reasons. First, Kuyper was, as Bratt points, out a blend of Puritan, Victorian, and Modern thought.\textsuperscript{17} In other words, Kuyper cannot be defined simplistically nor understood as totally outside the spirit of his age.\textsuperscript{18} This does not mean that Kuyper completely surrendered to the zeitgeist; rather it means that Kuyper’s anti-modernism (read “Calvinism”) was a reaction to the plethora and volume of the myriad of modern ideas. In fact, Kuyper “used the Modernist moment to cultivate a Calvinist stance.”\textsuperscript{19} Second, opinions vary based on which aspect of Kuyper is emphasized. For example, most positive evaluations of Kuyper exclude the mention of any of his more controversial theological statements, merely acknowledging Kuyper’s insightful worldview.\textsuperscript{20} On the other hand, many negative appraisals of Kuyper emphasize one or another of Kuyper’s theological opinions without objectively considering his significant cultural contributions.\textsuperscript{21} A more balanced and less prejudiced attitude toward Kuyper’s virtues and shortcomings in both life and thought is necessary in order to fairly critique the man.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{17} Bratt, “Abraham Kuyper: Puritan, Victorian, Modern,” 54.

\textsuperscript{18} Bolt tries to see Kuyper’s thought neither under Scholasticism, nor Romanticism, but under the theme of “poet.” Cf. Bolt, “Abraham Kuyper as Poet,” 41.

\textsuperscript{19} Bratt, “Abraham Kuyper: Puritan, Victorian, Modern,” 68. Bratt notes: “His Calvinism was genuine, his proposals distinct from most others being offered around him. Yet he could not and would not escape those surroundings. He cultivated a baroque voice to overcome Victorian sentimentality; he clung to Victorian order to enter the Modern age; he used the Modernist moment to cultivate a Calvinist stance.”


\textsuperscript{22} Relatively, a balanced viewpoint on Kuyper is this: Wilhelm Kolfhaus, “The Significance of Abraham Kuyper for Reformed Theology,” \textit{Evangelical Quarterly} 2 (1930): 302-312; Rewerts, “The Significance of Abraham Kuyper for Reformed Theology”; McGoldrick, \textit{God’s Renaissance Man}, 227-245
Besides the confusion surrounding the extent of Kuyper’s ties to modernism, some of his more controversial theological views need to be addressed. It does appear that Kuyper’s perspectives on immediate regeneration and eternal justification stems from the influence of modernism, but this may actually be a sign of the extra emphasis he places on God’s sovereignty in salvation in reaction to the strong current of human-centered ideas in which he found himself.

7.1.2. Kuyper’s Proposition

Everywhere in his writings in building a God-centered soteriology Kuyper persistently rejects any human-centered ideas or modern principles. In Modernism, Kuyper argues that even though modernistic ideas seem to be “fabulously beautiful” they ultimately have a “deceptive beauty” because modernism is “devoid of all reality.”

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Kuyper there are three “realities” missing from modernism: (1) God (Absolute Reality); (2) prayer in petition (religious activity); and (3) divine government (divine providence). For Kuyper, by underestimating or ignoring such crucial realities modernism is no more than a “painful” thought. Kuyper asserts that modernists violate the first principle of theol (θεολογία since they rely on human subjectivity, inevitably elevating man’s sovereignty over God’s in their theology. In *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* Kuyper criticizes Schleiermacher and Hegel, leaders of theological movements which were significantly influenced by modernism. Kuyper says that the first principle of theol should be the thinking of God, not the speaking of man. Yet, Kuyper sees Schleiermacher’s “psychologic-empiric” and Hegel’s “speculative” theological methods as beginning with the feeling and reasoning of human beings, and so they are “falsifications of the conception of theology.”

Thus, in both schools, everything that had so far been known by the name of theology was in principle destroyed. There were no longer two, God and

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29 Kuyper, “Modernism,” 89.


man, the former of whom has imparted knowledge of Himself to the latter; there was, in fact, nothing else, but man, in whom alone, according to the speculative school, “the Ever-Immanent Spirit” (der ewigimmanente Geist) came to consciousness of himself; and who according to the subjective-empiric school, experienced subjective perceptions, from which he formed for himself subjective representations of a religious character.\textsuperscript{34}

In \textit{Lectures on Calvinism},\textsuperscript{35} Kuyper champions Calvinism as the legitimate life system and principle to uphold against modernism. Against the spirit of the French Revolution, “\textit{Ni dieu ni maître!}” (Neither God nor master!), and the central tenet of modernism, “building a world from the data of the natural man,” Kuyper emphasizes that a man’s life is lived in the \textit{Divine presence}, the central tenet of Calvinism.\textsuperscript{36} According to Kuyper, modernism “wages war for the sake of the glory of man, being inspired not by the humble mind of Golgotha, but by the pride of Hero-worship.”\textsuperscript{37} Many religions which embrace modern ideas promote the view that existence is merely for “man’s sake, aiming at his safety, his liberty, [and] his elevation.”\textsuperscript{38} However, Calvinism is “diametrically opposed to all this.”\textsuperscript{39} Kuyper notes:

\begin{quote}
The starting-point . . . is God and not Man. Man is the instrument and means, God alone is here the goal, the point of departure and the point of arrival, the fountain, from which the waters flow, and at the same time, the ocean into which they finally return . . . . First stands the confession of the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} Kuyper, \textit{Encyclopedia}, 314-315 (III.I. §63).

\textsuperscript{35} Abraham Kuyper, \textit{Lectures on Calvinism} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931). Six lectures (Calvinism a Life-system, Calvinism and Religion, Calvinism and Politics, Calvinism and Science, Calvinism and Art, and Calvinism and the Future) were delivered at Princeton University in 1898 under the auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation.


\textsuperscript{37} Kuyper, \textit{Lectures}, 19.

\textsuperscript{38} Kuyper, \textit{Lectures}, 44.

\textsuperscript{39} Kuyper, \textit{Lectures}, 45.
absolute Sovereignty of the Triune God; for of Him, through Him, and unto Him are all things.\textsuperscript{40}

Kuyper thinks that unlike modernism which initiates from the human being, Calvinism begins with God, processes through God, and is accomplished only by God (Rom 11:36). Thus, according to Kuyper God-centered Calvinism rather than human-centered modernism is the only valid principle and life system.\textsuperscript{41}

Once again, Kuyper’s goal is to advance the idea of God’s absolute sovereignty over not only theology but also one’s entire worldview and life system.\textsuperscript{42} From this perspective one can see why many scholars have correctly pointed out that the “emphasis on God’s sovereignty” is Kuyper’s fundamental theme running through the every aspect of his thought. Although each scholar may have given Kuyper’s emphasis on God’s

\textsuperscript{40} Kuyper, Lectures, 46.


sovereignty a different name, e.g., “principal thinking,”43 a “theocentric character,”44 “the fundamental principle,”45 “[a] strong belief,”46 “the ideas of God’s greatness,”47 “[the] absolute sovereignty,”48 etc., their meaning is essentially the same, i.e., that God exerts sovereign authority over everything.

7.2. Kuyper’s Soteriological Views

Kuyper’s maximal emphasis on the sovereignty of God is evident throughout his soteriology.49 For Kuyper, the idea that no one other than God Himself saves sinners cannot be overstated. The fourth parallel characteristic of sanctification and justification, the transcendence of God’s sovereignty in salvation, is Kuyper’s fundamental message permeating both definitive sanctification and active justification.

7.2.1. Kuyper and Definitive Sanctification

In Het werk van den Heiligen Geest,50 Kuyper finds it difficult to conceive of

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43 Bratt, Dutch Calvinism in Modern America, 17.
44 McGoldrick, God’s Renaissance Man, 112.
47 Rewerts, “The Significance of Abraham Kuyper for Reformed Theology,” 152.
48 Praamsma, Let Christ Be King, 109.
49 Kuyper’s maximized sense has often become the focal point of criticism to Kuyper’s soteriology. This will be dealt with in detail in a later section.
sanctification as merely about the Christian life.\footnote{Kuyper, Het werk, 3:4; Work, 432.} Even though sanctification has much to offer in this regard,\footnote{In Kuyper’s understanding, sanctification occurs throughout \textit{wholly} and \textit{all} of a person. The soul and consciousness are sanctified beforehand rather than the human body. See Kuyper, Het werk, 3:29, 100; Work, 448, 490.} Kuyper says that it must also be included in the confessions and ranked with all the other established doctrines such as reconciliation and atonement.\footnote{“Uitgangspunt van alle beter inzicht en allen richtiger gang te dezen moet dus gezocht in terugkeer tot de besliste uitspraak, dat de ‘heiligmaking’ zelve een stuk der \textit{leer}, een integreerend deel van onze \textit{belijdenis}, evengoed als het bloed der verzoening een \textit{mysterie}, en dus in vollen zin een \textit{dogma} is. Niet genoeg kan het nog jarenlang voor de ooren der gemeente in haar saamvergaderingen herhaald worden: ‘En nu komen we tot het dogma der heiligmaking.’” See Kuyper, Het werk, 3:4; Work, 433.} For Kuyper, sanctification is not only a doctrine but a mystery. When he speaks of sanctification as a mystery his intent is “to \textit{cut off} at once every representation which makes ‘sanctification’ to consist of the human effort to make oneself holy or holier”\footnote{Kuyper, Het werk, 3:8; Work, 435. “Met dit te zeggen is al aanstonds bedoeld, dat dient afgesneden elke voorstelling, alsof ‘heiligmaking’ bestaan zou in een zeker heilig of heiliger maken van iemands eigen persoon.”} (emphasis added). Kuyper’s strong opposition to Arminianism and synergism underlies his whole understanding of sanctification. Kuyper’s view of God-driven sanctification can be seen in his view of: (1) a twofold framework of sanctification; (2) the role of the human in sanctification; and (3) the relation of perfectionism to sanctification.

7.2.1.1. The Twofold Framework of Sanctification

In \textit{Het werk van den Heiligen Geest} Kuyper defines sanctification by distinguishing...
between the terms “sanctification” (*heiligmaking*) and “holiness” (*heiligheid*). According to Kuyper, holiness “has reference, not to personal dispositions and desire, but to the sum-total of all the holy works required by the law.” But sanctification “refers not to any work of the law, but exclusively to the work of creating holy dispositions in the heart”\(^55\) (emphasis in the original). Thus for Kuyper sanctification is *not* related to the human’s good works but holiness *is*. Kuyper adds:

Sanctification is *God’s work* [*werk van God*] in us, whereby He imparts to our members a holy disposition, inwardly filling us with delight in His law and with repugnance to sin. But good works are *acts of man* [*daden van menschen*], which spring from this holy disposition. Hence sanctification is the source of good works, the lamp that shall shine with their light, the capital of which they are the interest. Thus, “sanctification” and “good works” are entirely different things. “Sanctification” is a work of God; “good works” are of men. “Sanctification” hides in secret; “good works” come out. “Sanctification” imparts something to man; “good works” take something out of him. “Sanctification” forces the root into the ground; to do “good works” forces the fruit out of the fruitful tree [emphasis in the original].\(^56\)

Kuyper’s definition of “sanctification” (*heiligmaking*) as solely God’s work makes it the object of “holiness” which matches the idea of definitive sanctification. Likewise he

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defines “holiness” (*heiligheid*) as man’s participation, making it the practical fruit of sanctification which is analogous to progressive sanctification.

Kuyper also distinguishes between “perfect in parts” (*volkomenheid in deelen*) and “imperfect in degrees” (*onvolkomenheid in trappen*) in sanctification. Kuyper illustrates this with a metaphor: an infant, though very small and immature, is fully human in every way (“perfect in parts”). Yet the infant is not perfect in degrees since it has not yet attained its full growth and maturity (“imperfect in degrees”). From the perspective of “perfect in parts” the infant does not appear to need to grow, but from the point of view of “imperfect in degrees” the infant obviously must grow and increase in every respect. Kuyper applies this metaphor to sanctification. When God turns believers into saints by implanting one vital principle (*één levensbeginsel*) into their hearts, believers are *perfectly* sanctified, i.e., “perfect in parts.” Nevertheless, believers still must work out their sanctification since they are still immature in the sense of “imperfect in degrees.” Kuyper elaborates:

In this sense sanctification is a *perfect* work; not externally, but on God’s part, in that He causes the sanctifying principle to affect every member. He does not first sanctify the will, then the understanding, or first the soul and then the body; but His work embraces the entire new man at once. But sanctification is *imperfect* in the degree of its development. When for then years God has wrought in us, the holy desire must be much stronger than in the beginning. This is the result of growth, of gradual increase, despite many ups and downs, almost imperceptible. Hence there are steps, *ascending* from less to more with reference to the new man; and *descending* from more to less in the dying of the old; but in both a gradual change, ever

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59 Kuyper’s view on the nature of the old and new man is a realistic view in a sense that the old man is entirely and completely changed in its nature into (literally!) the *new* nature. See Kuyper, *Het werk*, 3:82-83; *Work*, 478.
farther from Satan and nearer to God [emphasis in the original]. From God’s position the believer’s sanctification in parts is perfect and complete at once, but from the human’s position sanctification is still imperfect and must be developed by degrees. Kuyper further argues that the proper priority of “perfect in parts” and “imperfect in degrees” is that “perfect in parts” is acquired first as the precondition of the required “imperfect in degrees.” For without “perfect in parts” (i.e., unless God first sanctifies), “imperfect in degrees” (gradual development) is impossible. Kuyper’s version of sanctification that is “perfect in parts” is clearly reminiscent of definitive sanctification, and imperfect sanctification in degrees obviously suggests of the idea of progressive sanctification.

Kuyper uses another metaphor in E Voto Dordraceno to describe the twofold structure of the believer’s moral life, i.e., root (wortel) and branch (tak). The believer’s life, according to Kuyper, should bear spiritual fruit on the branch, but branches must be sustained by their roots. The root is Christ and the branch is the believer’s moral life. Any disposition toward developing the believer’s sacred life comes from the “root” of Christ and his power, not from the branch per se. The efficient cause of the branch bearing

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60 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:69-70; Work, 469.

61 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:75; Work, 472-473.

62 Abraham Kuyper, E Voto Dordraceno: toelichting op den Heidelbergschen Catechismus, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1892). Hereafter this edition will be cited as E Voto followed by volume and page number. When quoted from the Dutch text, the original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages.

63 Kuyper, E Voto, 2:396 (Sunday XXIV, Chap. VI).

64 “Ons zedelijk leven heeft dus tweéerlei: het heeft een leven in den tak en een leven in den wortel, en die wortel is Christus. En gelijk nu bij een plant, uit den wortel het sap opstijgt en in de twijgen indringt en ze tieren doet, zoo ook is het bij Gods kind. Ook zijn zedelijk leven begint niet in de takken en twijgen van zijn eigen overlegging en neiging, maar komt uit den wortel op. Niet die takken beheerschen
fruit in the believer’s holy life is based on the root of Christ and his merit. Here we see that Kuyper’s “root” of moral life is analogous to definitive sanctification and his “branch” of moral life matches the idea of progressive sanctification.

In *De gemeene gratie* Kuyper defines sanctification using a third metaphor i.e., the “germ,” the “root,” and the “branch.” According to Kuyper, just like a tree the human being consists of three components: the germ of new life (*levenskiem*), the root (*wortel*), and the branch (*tak*). Life is first sparked by the hidden, latent “germ” which God germinates. “I” (*ik*), the “root,” develops in the ground until it can finally stretch out its “branches” from the root into the world. For Kuyper, the germ of self is the inner core (*kern*) of ego and the behavior of self is the periphery (*omtrek*). Kuyper argues that when God sows new seed (*nieuwe zaad*) or germ (*kiem*) into the inner core of *ik*, the core is *sanctified* into the self’s new habit (*hebbelijkheid*) now being not against God but toward God. Nevertheless, the periphery of “I” is still exposed to the world so the


65 Abraham Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1903). Hereafter this edition will be cited as *De gemeene gratie* followed by volume and page number. When quoted from the Dutch text, the original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages.

66 Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 2:327.

67 “Ge kunt een plant u dus voorstellen als bestaande uit drie deelen: 1. de levenskiem; 2. de wortels die zich in den grond uitbreiden, en 3. de takken die zich in de lucht uitspreiden. Op den mensch overgebracht, is dan dit eerste, de levenskiem, zijn verborgen *ik*; zijn die wortels de innerlijke ontwikkeling van zijn wezen, waardoor hem de levenssappen uit God toekomen, en zijn die takken de levensuitingen waarmee hij uitkomt in de wereld.” See Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 2:327.

68 Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 2:306. Berkouwer criticizes Kuyper’s distinction between the center of self and the periphery of self since Berkouwer thinks that this is a denial of the Spirit’s operation *in the whole of man*. See Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, 61.

69 Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, 2:308.
ceaseless effort of struggling with the world is still needed even if the core of \( \text{ik} \) is decisively sanctified. In this framework, the transformation of the inner core where it remains in a sanctified condition is solely the work of God, and the endeavor of the periphery to develop in sanctity is the work of the human being. Here again the germ is analogous to definitive sanctification and the development of the \( \text{ik} \) matches the idea of progressive sanctification.

In *Dictaten dogmatiek*\textsuperscript{70} Kuyper proposes a threefold structure for sanctification: origin (\textit{oorsprong}), process (\textit{voortgang}), and completion (\textit{voltooiing}).\textsuperscript{71} Here the original worker of sanctification is no one but God.\textsuperscript{72} God’s will to sanctify His people is already determined in the eternal decree so it is by definition external to them.\textsuperscript{73} In Kuyper’s thinking God Himself plans, works, and supervises His people’s sanctification at every stage. Kuyper avoids any synergistic method of sanctification, arguing instead that human beings should be played like an instrument in God’s hand (\textit{als instrument in Gods hand}).\textsuperscript{74} To run in a Pelagian or Arminian direction to gain sanctification is to overlook

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek: College-Dictaat van een der Studenten*, 5 vols. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: J. B. Hulst, 1910). *Dictaten dogmatiek* is a manuscript of Kuyper’s doctrinal teaching taken down by his students. This includes the doctrine of God (vol. 1); Bible and creation (vol. 2); providence, sin, and covenant (vol. 3); soteriology, ecclesiology, and sacraments (vol. 4); and eschatology (vol. 5). Hereafter this edition will be cited as *Dictaten dogmatiek* followed by volume and page number. When quoted from the Dutch text, the original spelling, italics, capitalization, and punctuation will be retained in quoted passages.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek*, 4:145 (Locus de salute, §9. De sanctificatione). According to Kuyper, sanctification occurs in the threefold sphere, namely, in the consciousness, habit, and actions. See Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek*, 4:134.
\item \textsuperscript{72} “Wie werkt de heiligmaking? De werker is eeniglijk en alleenlijk God, van het eerste begin tot ’t allerlaatste einde.” See Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek*, 4:144.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek*, 4:141.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek*, 4:144. Kuyper seems to keep in mind here the danger of “Ethical Theology,” which teaches that through good works and a highly moral life, believers can reach sanctification and holiness by their own efforts. Cf. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, Preface; idem, *Het werk*, 3:34;
\end{itemize}
the fact that sanctification is entirely God’s act of grace. Kuyper believes that sanctification is not something that is obtained by works alone; rather, sanctification is the process which starts with the new life implanted originally by God and continues in a process that is entirely completed only in the eschaton. In his threefold framework the “origin” (oorsprong) is analogous to definitive sanctification, and the “process” (voortgang) of sanctification is analogous to progressive sanctification.

Kuyper opposes any Arminian or ethical teaching that sanctification is substantially man’s work or achievement, saying that if it were significantly directed or aided by man’s effort, this sanctification would be desolate (troosteloos) and godless (godeloos). The only reason human beings can even participate in progressive sanctification is not because it is in their own nature but rather because God gives them the power and capacity.

In Kuyper’s representations of sanctification (heiligmaking), the terms “perfect in

Work, 451.

75 Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:142.
76 “Heiligmaking is niet, dat wij eens goed werk doen, maar het is het opschieten in ons van het ingeplante nieuwe leyen met takken en vruchten.” See Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:149.
77 On Kuyper’s eschatology, see Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 5:3-327 (Locus de consummatione saeculi).
78 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:34; Work, 451.
79 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:34; Work, 451.
80 “Waar geen sprake is van enkele heilige daden, maar van het in ons aanbrengen van een zin en neiging, die denouden mensch haat en vliedt (na eertijds dienouden mensch juist gemind en nageloopen te hebben) kan er nooit sprake zijn van iets, wat wijzelven deden; want wijzelven kunnen bij ons hart niet bij; we hebben over onzen inwendigen persoon geen macht, en missen elk middel om zelf, persoonlijk, een andere neiging in ons teweeg te brengen; en zelfs waar we ons inbeelden, dat we dit wel doen, rust deze inbeelding op niets dan zelfbedrog. Alleen de Schepper, omdat Hij Schepper is, kan dit werk in ons tot stand brengen; en waar dit werk komt, daar komt het dus ook onwederstandelijk.” See Kuyper, Het werk, 3:90-91; Work, 483.
parts” (*volkomenheid in deelen*), “root” (*wortel*), “germ of life” (*levenskiem*), and “origin” (*oorsprong*) all refer to God who is the initiator of the believer’s sanctification;\(^{81}\) this is the very picture of definitive sanctification. The terms “holiness” (*heiligheid*), “imperfect in degrees” (*onvolkomenheid in trappen*), “branch” (*tak*), change in the “periphery” (*omtrek*) of self, and “process” (*voortgang*) of sanctification refer to the human need for gradual development in holiness throughout life, a concept which is identical to progressive sanctification.\(^{82}\)

7.2.1.2. The Role of Human Beings in Progressive Sanctification

Although Kuyper uses a wide variety of terms and ideas to emphasize God’s authority to the fullest, he does not totally ignore the role of human beings in sanctification. Of course Kuyper does maintain that God alone works in the dimension of definitive sanctification, but he also acknowledges that human beings have their role in the dimension of progressive sanctification.

In order to explain the necessity of human activity in sanctification, Kuyper compares “nothing” (*niets*) to “something” (*iets*). Kuyper argues that “if man is *nothing* in the absolute sense, as some fondly proclaim, then God cannot work in him; for He cannot work in *nothing*. In *nothing*, one can make *nothing* and *nothing* can be

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\(^{81}\) Bratt points out Kuyper’s God-centered view on sanctification: “Real sanctification, just like real justification, was a finished act of God.” See Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*, 106.

\(^{82}\) Berkouwer criticizes Kuyper because Berkouwer thinks that Kuyper understands the twofold sanctification (God’s gift and believer’s obligation) in an *unreconciled contradiction*. See Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, 22-23. Yet, this criticism does not seem to be quite right as shall be shown below.
implanted” (emphasis in the original). Rather, Kuyper asserts that “since man is a being [wezen], man must be something” (emphasis in the original). Nevertheless in reality a human being is still nothing before God. Kuyper explains that the human’s nothingness before God is something like the saints’ perpetual “self-denial,” which always has in mind that compared to God man has no value.

_Only if_ one confesses and admits that one’s own self is nothing before God can one be something as significant as an instrument in God’s hand. Kuyper opposes both mystical and Pelagian perspectives of the human being since the former basically holds that “man is nothing” and the latter maintains “man is anything.” Kuyper proposes that man is a very significant “something,” but only as an instrument from God’s point of view. In this sense Kuyper can say that “God is pleased to use man as an instrument under his own ability and responsibility to incite him to activity” (emphasis in the original). Kuyper further notes:

>The Lord alone performs the work from the beginning to the end. But He performs it partly by the aid of means; and the instrument chosen is often man himself, who cooperates with God. And to this human instrumentality the Scripture refers when, in connection with sanctification, it admonishes us to good works. As in nature God gives the seed and the forces in the soil and rain and sunshine to mature the fruit of the earth, while at the same time

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84 Kuyper, _Het werk_, 3:62; _Work_, 464.

85 Kuyper, _Het werk_, 3:63; _Work_, 465.

86 Kuyper, _Het werk_, 3:63; _Work_, 465.

87 “[D]e mensch is wel terdege een zeer beteekenend iets, mits ge hem maar altoos als volstrekt afhankelijk instrument in de hand van zijn Grod aanziet.” See Kuyper, _Het werk_, 3:64; _Work_, 465.

88 Kuyper, _Het werk_, 3:96; _Work_, 487. “. . . het Gode behaagt, ook den mensch als instrument te gebruiken, en aan den mensch onder zijn eigene verantwoordelijkheid en bekwaamheid een prikkel tot het doen . . .”
He uses the farmer to perfect His work, so it is also in sanctification: God causes it to work effectually; but He employs the human instrument to cooperate with Him, as the saw works together with him that handles it [emphasis in the original].

In this sense sanctification is not just a gift imparted, but also a duty imposed. Like the farmer, the human being should cultivate his “crops” as prescribed by sanctification using the common grace that God provides. However, Kuyper warns against thinking that by God using man as an instrument God somehow depends upon man to fulfill his own sanctification, saying “[t]his is impossible; by nature man can mar sanctification, but never further it” (emphasis added). Rather, Kuyper sees God’s boundless grace in using a totally unqualified man as an instrument of sanctification.

Kuyper’s concept of progressive sanctification is expressed in the terms “self-purification” (zelfreiniging) or “repudiation” (verloochening). Here the role of human beings is definitely in view, yet Kuyper cautions us to avoid letting the intent (bedoeling) of self-purification be misconstrued:

 Yet the intention must be strongly considered; the Church has always taught that a work could not be called good unless it is directed to the glory of God. This is a vital point which must animate and give direction to the whole matter: only to the glory of God. Every other intention makes the “good” work evil. The “glory of God” is the solid brand that should never be missing. Even the effort to do good works is impossible without Soli Deo Gloria [emphasis in the original].

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89 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:97; Work, 488.
90 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:95; Work, 487.
91 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:97; Work, 488. “Dit kan daarom niet, overmits de mensch van nature wel heiligmaking bederven, maar ze nooit bevorderen kan.”
93 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:115; Work, 502. “Toch moet ook met die bedoeling wel terdege gerekend worden; want de kerke Christi heeft er alle eeuwen door steeds op aangedrongen, dat nooit eenig werk in
Here Kuyper maintains that self-purification and repudiation are fundamentally intended for the glory of God; “self-glorification” or a “self-made man” attitude have no place at all.

The fact that God is sovereign over every aspect of sanctification does not preclude a role for human beings, at least in the dimension of progressive sanctification. God uses human beings as instruments to fulfill sanctification. As God’s instruments human beings are more than nothing (niets); we are in fact made over into something (iets) significant.

7.2.1.3. Kuyper on Perfectionism

Believers in the definitive condition of “sanctification” (heiligmaking, not heiligheid) through the implanting of the germ of life (levenskiem) by God are also in the condition of “perfect in parts” (volkomenheid in deelen). Although the first aspect of sanctification is completely finished in our being “perfect in parts,” Kuyper argues that this definitive condition does not at all imply a sinless perfection. In Perfectionism, Kuyper points out


two superficial aspects: first, perfectionism is superficial compared to what God’s holiness actually requires, and second, perfectionism is superficial compared to the gravity of sin’s corruption. Kuyper maintains that perfectionism grossly understates both of these, i.e., God’s standard of holiness and our total depravity are far greater than our capacity even to understand. In other words, perfectionism diminishes the need for progressive sanctification, which is the aspect of “imperfect in degrees” that can only be accomplished over a lifetime. What is more, perfectionism places far too much confidence in human nature. Perfectionists display an unconscionable haughtiness in thinking that God’s absolutely perfect holiness could be theirs in this life. They completely miss the uniqueness of God’s attribute in this respect; their low view of holiness is insufficient.

7.2.2. Kuyper on Active Justification

Kuyper’s definition of justification has been criticized because many see it as an endorsement of justification from eternity. In fact, Kuyper’s overly strong emphasis on

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95 Kuyper, “Perfectionism,” 146-147.
96 Kuyper, “Perfectionism,” 147.
97 Kuyper, Het werk, 3:69-70; Work, 469.
99 Kuyper, “Perfectionism,” 147.
100 “De fout der Perfectionisten is dus, dat zij dat kleine stukje der heiligmaking aanzien voor de geheele heiligmaking.” See Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:157.
101 See, e.g., Young, “Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism,” 60; van Genderen and Velema,
God’s sovereignty does give the impression that he favors an “exclusive” eternal justification. However, since Kuyper also includes the idea of active justification he does not rule out passive justification or faith from his overall view of justification. This section further reveals Kuyper’s complex perspective.

7.2.2.1. Active Justification and Objective Justification

Although Kuyper says relatively little about the distinction between active and passive justification, a direct reference is found in his writings about Comrie. Here Kuyper states, “I keep to the exquisite distinction [between active and passive justification],” in refuting the “English Free Grace sect.” Kuyper holds that active justification is “the act of the justifying God” and passive justification is “its termination and application to individual believers.”

Even though Kuyper seldom uses the exact terms “active” and “passive” justification, the concepts are inherent throughout his writings. For example, Kuyper distinguishes between objective justification (objectieve rechtvaardiging) and subjective

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102 Kuyper, “Alexander Comrie: Lessons from His Career,” 279n*. Here, the English Free Grace sect might refer to English antinomianism, which excessively highlights free grace in salvation while underestimating any participation on the part of the believer. For a detailed discussion on antinomianism, see section 3.4.2 of this study.

103 Kuyper, “Alexander Comrie: Lessons from His Career,” 279n*. Here Kuyper borrows Hoornbeek’s exposition from his Summa Controversiarum in order to describe the nature of the distinction.
justification (subjectieve rechtvaardiging). Objective justification is the "judicial act ante fidem [before faith]" since the decision in the court of God does not rely on the sinner’s decision in faith. On the other hand, subjective justification is the acceptance and awareness within one’s own consciousness by faith (door het geloof) of being objectively justified.

Kuyper also distinguishes between “justification itself” (rechtvaardigmaking zelve) and its “its publication” or “its promulgation” (afkondiging). “Justification itself” refers to the divine decision that occurs in the holy judgment seat of God (in de heilige vierschaar Gods). This is completely objective because it originates entirely from outside the sinner. On the other hand, “its publication” refers to “a specific moment in our life when for the first time justification [which occurs in foro Dei] is promulgated to our own consciousness” (emphasis in the original). This is the subjective aspect of justification occurring in foro conscientiae. If “justification itself,” which occurs in foro Dei, is a fact then there must also be a certain moment where this becomes a living fact in

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104 Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:64 (Locus de salute, §4. De justificatione). The distinction of objective/subjective justification also appears in Bavinck as seen in chapter 4. See Bavinck, MD, 521; ORF, 459.

105 “De justificatio is eene rechterlijke uitspraak en die is niet afhankelijk van het al of niet aannemen van hem . . . des Heeren is niet afhankelijk van hetgeen de mensch in zijn geloof doet . . .” See Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:64.

106 “Er is dus tweeërlei te onderscheiden: de rechterlijke daad ante fidem en het besef van gerechtvaardigd te zijn en dat laatste komt alleen als de justificatio door het geloof is aangenomen.” See Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:64.

107 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:222-223; Work, 370.

108 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:222; Work, 370. “Wel is er een bepaald moment in ons leven, waarin deze rechtvaardigmaking voor het eerst in onze eigen consciëntie wordt afgekondigd.”
consciousness. Kuyper argues that “in order to become a living fact, it must have existed before” (emphasis added). That is, objective justification is the grounds for subjective justification in every respect.

Kuyper proposes several versions of this distinction in order to emphasize that a sinner’s subjective justification does not and cannot originate in any ability or capacity of the sinner’s own consciousness, but is only grounded in the objective decision that occurs in the court of God. Kuyper therefore states: “[O]ur righteousness is not something that needs to be the product of our own soul’s labor.” In opposition to modern soteriology which puts the human being’s role higher than God’s, Kuyper consistently emphasizes through the concept of active justification that a man’s legal status is “determined not by his actual condition, nor by his own declaration, but by the sovereign under whom he stands” (emphasis in the original). Kuyper uses the distinction between active/objective justification and passive/subjective justification to further emphasize God’s sovereignty over justification. Kuyper elaborates as follows:

The sovereignty which reposes in an earthly king is only borrowed, derived, and laid upon him; but the sovereignty of the Lord our God is the source and fountainhead of all authority and of all binding force. If it belongs to the very essence of sovereignty, that by the ruler’s decision alone the status of his subjects is determined, then it must be clear, and it cannot be otherwise than that this very authority belongs originally, absolutely, and supremely to our God. Whom He judges guilty is guilty, and must be treated as guilty; and whom He declares just is just, and must be treated as just. Before He entered Gethsemane, Jesus our King declared to His disciples: “Now are ye

109 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:223; Work, 370.
10 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:223; Work, 370.
11 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:223; Work, 446. “. . . onze gerechtigheid niet iets is, dat product van den arbeid onzer eigene ziele behoef te zijn.”
112 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:214; Work, 362.
clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” And this is His
declaration even now, and it shall forever remain so. Our state, our place,
our lot for eternity depends not upon what we are, nor upon what others see
in us, nor upon what we imagine or presume ourselves to be, but only upon
what God *thinks* of us, what He *counts* us to be, what He, the Almighty and
Just Judge, *declares* us to be [emphasis in the original].

Only the concept of active justification allows us to fully grasp the truth that God’s
authoritative sovereignty extends over justification. In sum, Kuyper uses the distinction
of active/passive justification in order to secure God’s sovereignty in the arena of
justification. For Kuyper objective” (versus “subjective”) justification and “justification
itself” (versus “its publication”) have the same meaning as active justification.

7.2.2.2. Active Justification and Justification from Eternity

Kuyper’s conception of justification is composed of several steps; his idea of eternal
justification is contained in these steps. Kuyper lays out five steps in justification in *E
Voto*: (1) God’s sovereign decision of the Council (*Gods vrijmachtig Raadsbesluit*); (2)
the resurrection of Christ (*opstanding van Christus*); (3) implanting of the ability for faith
(*inplanting van het geloofsvermogen*); (4) actual faith (*daadwerkelijk geloof*); and (5) the
day of judgment (*den dag des oordeels*). The last four steps of justification are based
on the first, i.e., God’s free decision in the eternal Council. Since in Kuyper’s five-step
process the decision with regard to a sinner’s legal status is made in eternity, he does
argue that “the sinner’s justification need not wait until he is converted, nor until he has

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become conscious, nor even until he is born.”

Kuyper’s perspective is deeply grounded in his understanding of election. Kuyper upholds the supralapsarian perspective on election, maintaining that God’s decree of election is prior to the Fall. For him this is the cor ecclesiae (the heart of the church), inasmuch as he thinks that this is the most emphatic way to present the sovereignty of God and the fullness of Christ’s efficacy. As a supralapsarian Kuyper believes that God’s eternal decree to justify sinners is already decided before the world and human beings are even created.

However, in Kuyper’s fivefold justification, the actual (werkelijk) justification occurs not in the first step but in the third step, i.e., the moment that God implants the capacity for faith in sinners. Given that for Kuyper actual or full justification occurs in foro

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116 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:222; Work, 369. “... dan is het hieruit tevens duidelijk, waarom de rechtvaardigmaking van den zondaar volstrekt niet behoefde te wachten op zijn bekeering, ja, zelfs niet op zijn bewustzijn, zijn aanzijn of geboorte.”

117 In this study, Kuyper’s doctrine of election will not be dealt with in detail as it is beyond the scope of this paper. Stated briefly, Kuyper holds supralapsarianism, which maintains that God’s decrees of election and reprobation logically precede the Fall. Some might think that those who hold supralapsarianism also defend the idea of eternal justification because both emphasize God’s eternal decision rather than any others. Yet, as Beach points out, this has not always happened. For example, Geerhardus Vos, who is a supralapsarian, denies the idea of justification from eternity. See Vos, Systematische theologie, 24, 98. Cf. Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” 58n180. Historically speaking, supralasarians, e.g., Beza, Zanchius, Ames, Gomarus, etc., do not defend eternal justification. On Kuyper’s doctrine of election and the theological controversies between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism in the Dutch context, see Willem van der Schee, “Kuyper’s Archimedes’ Point: The Reverend Abraham Kuyper on Election,” in Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Work, eds. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 102-110; Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” 17-21, 53-55.


119 “... dat de rechtvaardigmaking in de Heilige Schrift als een eeuwige daad Gods wordt geopenbaard, dat is zulk een daad, die aan geen bepalingdoor eenig oogenblik uit het menschelijk aanzijn gebonden is.” See Kuyper, Het werk, 3:222; Work, 369.

120 “3. wordt deze rechtvaardigmaking werkelijk in u, als God de hand aan u slaat en u het
conscientiae, not in foro Dei,\textsuperscript{121} the first step of justification (God’s sovereign decision of the Council) refers to active justification, and the third and fourth steps of justification (implanting the capacity for faith and applying actual faith) refer to passive justification.

In Dictaten dogmatiek, Kuyper presents an even more complex structure of justification, i.e., nine steps: (1) divine decree (goddelijk besluit); (2) eternally fixed in the constitutio Mediatoris (van eeuwigheid vastgemaakt in de constitutio Mediatoris); (3) active and passive offering (actieve & passieve offerande); (4) the resurrection of Christ (opstanding van Christus); (5) implanting of ability for faith (inplanting van het geloofsvermogen); (6) preaching of the Gospel (prediking van het Evangelie); (7) faith in conversion (geloof in de bekeering); (8) the effect of faith in continuing conversion (werking van het geloof in voortgaande bekeering); and (9) the last judgment (laatste Oordeel).\textsuperscript{122} According to Kuyper, the first to the fourth steps represent objective justification, and the fifth to the eighth steps represent subjective justification. In this ninefold structure, the completion of justification (not in an eschatological sense, but in the sense of realization) does not occur in the first step, namely, in God’s eternal decree, but begins from the fifth step, which is the implanting of the capacity of faith in foro conscientiae. Kuyper states, “[J]ustification therefore flows with faith by which justification is affirmed in foro conscientiae and is adopted from the same source [God’s eternal decree to justify].”\textsuperscript{123} Kuyper further proposes that God’s eternal decree to justify

\textsuperscript{121} Here, actual or full justification refers to the actual realization of the change of legal status in one’s own consciousness and perception.

\textsuperscript{122} Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:45 (Locus de salute, §4. De Justificatione).

\textsuperscript{123} Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:45. “De justificatio vloeit derhalve met het geloof, waardoor
as the *opus immanens* is not a mere “abstract judicial conclusion” (*abstracte rechterlijke conclusie*) which has no tangible place in reality, but the divine promise as *ad extra* that will be realized in the sinner by God’s sovereign power.124

The distinction between active and passive justification is logical, not temporal.125 If active justification is understood as the eternal termination of justification outside of time, this could be called the exclusive idea of justification from eternity, which is certainly problematic.126 However, since Kuyper refers to the dimension of passive justification (viz., justified by faith *in foro conscientiae*),127 we can say that Kuyper does not hold this exclusive view of eternal justification.128 Nevertheless, the reason Kuyper’s critics still regard him as maintaining the idea of exclusive eternal justification is that he tends to overemphasize the first step of justification (God’s eternal decree to justify)129 and its immutability and firmness as the ultimate source of all the

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124 “De justificatie ab aeterno is dus een opus immanens ad extra (d.w.z. zulk een inblijvend werk, dat eens exeuns worden zal). Deze justificatio ab aeterno kwam als opus immanens in Gods wezen tot stand, niet door de abstracte rechterlijke conclusie, maar in verbinding met de souvereine scheppersmacht des Heeren nl. met die macht Gods, waardoor Hij in het supremum judicium den mensch zoo kan doen komen, als Hij wil, dat deze er komen zal.” See Kuyper, *Dictaten dogmatiek*, 4:61.

125 For a detailed discussion on the nature of active justification, see chapter 3 of this study.

126 In fact, if the *exclusive* idea of eternal justification refers to the idea that totally neglects the aspect of passive justification (e.g., the role of faith, execution of divine decree to justify in time, justification *in foro conscientiae*, etc.), it is doubtful whether this exclusive idea even exists throughout theological history.


128 Throughout Kuyper’s writings, he tries to distinguish between the “principle” and “its application.” For Kuyper, the nature of the former is eternal and that of the latter is temporal. The priority between the two is always upon the former. See Abraham Kuyper, “Conservatism and Orthodoxy: False and True Preservation,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 80-82.

129 Beach states that the acknowledgement of “God’s eternal decree to justify” is resolved as “confessionally permissible” in the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905 under the condition that the traditional
other steps, and to some degree this overemphasis seems to hint at Kuyper’s overlooking or underestimating the importance of passive justification, i.e., the actualization of the eternal decree by faith in foro conscientiae. In this sense there is a tension in Kuyper between active justification (where God has justified in foro Dei, but justification has not yet been fully realized in foro conscientiae), and exclusive eternal justification (where God finishes the act of justifying in eternity).

All the succeeding steps in Kuyper’s complex concept of justification, including the sinner’s justification that is realized and actualized in foro conscientiae, are solidly grounded in the first step, God’s eternal decree to justify in foro Dei. Unfortunately Kuyper’s overemphasis on this first step overshadows and obscures his endorsement of passive justification.

7.2.2.3. Active Justification and Faith

Kuyper is well aware of the contradiction between his view that God has justified sinners in the tribunal of God from eternity before faith and his simultaneous conviction that sinners are justified by faith alone. Strictly speaking, the former concept does not require faith, but the latter does. Kuyper does not try to resolve this; instead, he leaves it

framework, decree in eternity and its execution in time, should be kept. See Beach, “Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and ‘the Conclusions of Utrecht 1905,’” 57.

130 Kuyper, E Voto, 2:339 (Sunday XXIII, Chap. VII). According to Bavinck, there are differences concerning the order of God’s decree between Comrie and Kuyper. While justification follows election and the covenant of grace in Comrie’s thought, justification logically precedes the covenant of grace in Kuyper’s thought. See Bavinck, GD, 4:200n5 (§51.475); RD, 4:216n125.

131 Kuyper, Het werk, 2:224; Work, 371.
as a “contradictory” (tegenstrijdig) truth or antimony, saying that “Holy Scripture reveals to us these two equally solid, but seemingly contradictory truths, with equally firm resolution: (1) that, on the one hand, He has justified us in His own judgment-seat from eternity; and (2) that, on the other hand, in conversion we are justified only by faith”\(^{132}\) (emphasis in the original). In this tension, Kuyper speaks of both aspects of faith, namely, that “faith itself is fruit, effect, and consequence of our justification; while it is also true that, for us, justification begins to exist only as a result of our faith.”\(^{133}\) Kuyper does not explicitly name it, but this study shows that faith as both the cause and effect of justification is seen in the distinction between active and passive justification. Active justification in foro Dei becomes the object of passive justification sola fide in foro conscientiae.

Kuyper appeals to faith in salvation, saying, “In the way of salvation, everything depends upon faith; hence a correct conception of faith is the matter of utmost importance”\(^{134}\) (emphasis in the original). However, the correct conception recognizes that faith per se is by no means a sufficient basis for justification.\(^{135}\) The principium

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\(^{132}\) Kuyper, *Het werk*, 2:224; *Work*, 371. “... de Heilige Schrift ons deze twee even vaste, maar schijnbaar tegenstrijdige waarheden met even stellige beslistheid openbaart. Eenerzijds, dat Hij ons gerechtvaardigd heeft in zijn heilige vierschaar voor eeuwig. En anderzijds, dat wij pas gerechtvaardigd worden door het geloof, als we ons bekeeren.”

\(^{133}\) Kuyper, *Het werk*, 2:224; *Work*, 371. “... het geloof zelf een vrucht en gevolg en uitvloeisel is van onze rechtvaardigmaking, en dat toch niettemin omgekeerd onze rechtvaardigmaking voor ons pas begint te bestaan als gevolg van ons geloof.”

\(^{134}\) Kuyper, *Het werk*, 2:233; *Work*, 378. “... den weg der zaligheid aan het geloof schier alles hangt, is het dan ook zoo van het hoogste belang, dat we ons begrip van wat geloof zij...”

\(^{135}\) “Hierbij echter is het nu duidelijk, dat, hoe niets afdoende voor uw wezenlijke rechtvaardigmaking uw geloof ook zij, bij die rechtvaardigmaking uw geloof voor u zelven persoonlijk het alles afdoende is.” See Kuyper, *E Voto*, 2:344 (Sunday XXIII, Chap. VIII).
actionis (the principle of action) of justification is the will of God; the causa movens (moving cause) of justification is not the opus hominis (the work of man), but the opus Christi (the work of Christ). Kuyper believes that there is no causa meritoria (meritorious cause) of justification at all in man, but solely in Christ. Kuyper’s strong emphasis on divine sovereignty in salvation is vividly reflected throughout Kuyper’s whole discussion of faith in justification.

However, Kuyper places more emphasis on the effect of faith in foro Dei as represented in active justification rather than the instrumental cause of faith in foro conscientiae as depicted in passive justification. Faith is enabled by what was decided in the Council of God, and is activated in foro conscientiae, i.e., faith functions as sinners become conscious that they were justified in foro Dei. In this logical flow, faith functions not as the instrumental cause in passive justification, but as the effect of what happened in active justification. Ultimately this is the tension between the faith that reflects (afspiegelen) in one’s consciousness what happened in active justification,

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136 Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:63.
137 Kuyper, Dictaten dogmatiek, 4:67; idem, Het werk, 2:219; Work, 367.
138 Kuyper, E Voto, 2:338 (Sunday XXIII, Chap. VII).
139 Thus, Kersten criticizes Kuyper’s perspective on faith, which understands as becoming conscious of the dimension of active justification. See Kersten, Reformed Dogmatics, 2:421.
140 Kuyper, E Voto, 2:339 (Sunday XXIII, Chap. VII). A. van Egmond metaphorically describes the role of faith in Luther, Calvin, and Kuyper’s thought: “Where Lutherans describe faith metaphorically as the ‘beggar’s hand’ into which alms must fall and Calvin speaks of a hole that must be filled, Kuyper employs the metaphor of the sponge: faith as a sponge. Even if the sponge has not come into contact with the water of truth it is undeniably a sponge: the implanted capacity for faith. If it does, however, come into contact with the truth, it soaks it up; that is conscious faith.” See A. van Egmond, “Kuyper’s Dogmatic Theology,” in Kuyper Reconsidered: Aspects of His Life and Work, eds. Cornelis van der Kooi and Jan de Bruijn (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1999), 92.
and the faith through which (διά) sinners are justified in passive justification.¹⁴¹

7.3. God’s Sovereignty in Salvation

Kuyper’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty in justification and sanctification has made him the object of criticism. In addition to those previously cited, William Young says that Kuyper’s excessive magnification of God’s sovereignty merely contains a “metaphysical category” of theology that does not intimately connect it to the individual.¹⁴² G. C. Berkouwer also regards Kuyper’s overuse of the sovereignty of God in salvation as “abstract” and “speculative.”¹⁴³

However, we have also seen that Kuyper leaves room for man’s activity to somewhat mitigate his extreme dependence on God’s sovereignty in justification and sanctification. Rather than placing Kuyper outside the orthodox or confessional perspectives, Bratt points out that the emphasis on God’s sovereignty may simply be the “common root” or bridge between orthodox or confessional and activist or progressive soteriology.¹⁴⁴ Kuyper’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty could also be an effective hermeneutical foundation for understanding his soteriology. Kuyper seeks to (1) reject “any and every claim of those who would contribute the smallest part to their own

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¹⁴¹ Kuyper, Het werk, 2:223; Work, 370.

¹⁴² Young, “Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism,” 55-57.


¹⁴⁴ Bratt, Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat, 58.
salvation or sanctity by any endeavor on their part”;\(^{145}\) (2) refute Methodism, saying that “the Work of the Holy Spirit may not be displaced by the activity of the human spirit”;\(^ {146}\) and (3) confess that all things exist “for the sake of God. For, as the Scripture says, He has created all things for Himself.”\(^ {147}\) Kuyper simply desires to show that God and his sovereignty is at the center of everything. This is why Kuyper’s soteriology is so vigorous in defense of God’s sovereignty in justification and sanctification.\(^ {148}\)

7.4. Summary

Kuyper’s fundamental theme carried through both active justification and definitive sanctification is his emphasis on a proper understanding of the transcendent role of God’s sovereignty in salvation. This theme runs all through Kuyper’s thinking and writing.

Kuyper uses a variety of terms to describe the aspects of definitive and progressive sanctification and the distinction between them. In addition to

“sanctification” (heiligmaking) itself, “perfect in parts” (volkomenheid in deelen), moral life as a “root” (wortel), the “germ” of life (levenskiem), and the “origin” (oorsprong) of sanctification are very similar to the idea definitive sanctification. Beside the term “holiness” (heiligheid) itself, “imperfect in degrees” (onvolkomenheid in trappen), moral


\(^{146}\) Kuyper, Work, Postscript for American readers, xiv.

\(^{147}\) Kuyper, Lectures on Calvinism, 45.

\(^{148}\) Thus, most scholars mention that God’s sovereignty is the first principle in which Kuyper’s soteriology runs and performs. See, e.g., van Egmond, “Kuyper’s Dogmatic Theology,” 88-89; Bratt, Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat, 103-107, 185; van der Schee, “Kuyper’s Archimedes’ Point,” 104; McGoldrick, God’s Renaissance Man, 115; Kolthaus, “The Significance of Abraham Kuyper for Reformed Theology,” 306-309; Praamsma, Let Christ Be King, 109.
life as a “branch” (tak), changes in the self’s “periphery” (omtrek), and the “process” (voortgang) of sanctification all point to progressive sanctification. When Kuyper speaks of that instant when the believer’s condition becomes “perfect in parts” he does not mean that the gradual development of sanctification is unnecessary, nor does he suggest that believers are perfectly sinless in this life. Rather, Kuyper says that the divinely gracious act of definitive sanctification makes possible the necessary lifelong effort of believers to increase in sanctity.

Kuyper also uses a variety of terms to describe justification. His idea of “objective justification” and “justification itself” refers to the concept of active justification, and “subjective justification” and “its publication” (or “its promulgation”) represent passive justification. His complex fivefold and ninefold depictions of justification both use as their first step God’s eternal decree to justify; on this firm foundation sits faith, the recognition by sinners of what was performed on their behalf in foro Dei.

Kuyper offers all of these ideas in order to make it abundantly clear that he recognizes and distinguishes between what God alone does and what human beings can and cannot do in the realm of salvation. Most importantly for him, through his writings on active justification and definitive sanctification Kuyper vividly portrays both the sovereign ruler and the beginning point of salvation.

Throughout Kuyper’s works, the fourth parallel characteristic of active justification and definitive sanctification, i.e., God’s sovereignty in salvation, is on full display. All of the other characteristics of inseparability, objectivity and decisiveness, and Christ-centeredness that were examined in chapters 4 through 6 are also required to fully
understand divine sovereignty in salvation, so in that respect the other parallels are included within this last one.
PART III

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ACTIVE JUSTIFICATION AND DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION
CHAPTER 8
THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ACTIVE JUSTIFICATION AND DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION

The four parallel characteristics of active justification and definitive sanctification are not merely speculations or abstractions with no theological or practical application.¹ Theologically they help us to properly understand God’s sovereignty in balance with human responsibility in both justification and sanctification. Practically they help to strengthen the believer’s assurance and perseverance (Section 8.2.1), while avoiding the errors of either triumphalism or defeatism (Section 8.2.2).

8.1. Theological Significance

8.1.1. Providing a Balanced Soteriology

The need for balance between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in justification and sanctification has not been universally accepted in church history, and it remains elusive even today. For example, in reacting to the Arminian or semi-Pelagian viewpoints that embraced a synergistic formula, the antinomian perspective moved to the opposite

¹ As Turretin points out, theology has a “theoretico-practical” nature, which means that theology needs to have a concrete theoretical foundation, and based on that, praxis is naturally revealed and manifested. See Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 1:5-23. In light of Turretin’s observation, the notions of active justification and definitive sanctification, as shall be seen, also have a theoretico-practical nature. In fact, throughout the Reformed tradition, all doctrinal ideas are related to Christian praxis. Even the doctrine of predestination in the Reformed tradition, which seems to be speculative as some critics pose, has a theoretico-practical nature as well. On this, see Jae-Eun Park, “John Knox’s Doctrine of Predestination and Its Practical Application for His Ecclesiology,” Puritan Reformed Journal 5, no. 2 (July 2013): 65-90.
extreme, forcing a radical dependence on sovereignty and free grace.² Then in reaction to the antinomian stand, the neonomian perspective swung the pendulum the other way, reintroducing the need for human responsibility and activity into the doctrine of justification but failing to recognize God’s absolute rule. This polarization is evident in the conflict between hyper-Calvinism which overemphasizes God’s activity in salvation, and Arminianism in which human responsibility dominates.³

This unbalanced view has continued into the modern era. For example, the debate between “Lordship Salvation” and “Free Grace” is an extension of the contrasting perspectives on God’s sovereignty and human responsibility.⁴ The Free Grace school of thought dismisses Lordship theology as nomism or legalism because Lordship affirms human responsibility along with God’s sovereignty. On the other hand, the adherents of Lordship Salvation see in Free Grace’s denial of the need for faith, repentance, obedience or yieldedness an irresponsible “cheap grace.”⁵ In fact, Lordship Salvation reflects only

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² See section 3.4.2 of this study.
³ See section 3.4.3 of this study.
an apparent antimony between the sola fide narrative in Romans and faith without works is dead faith in James. The theological tug-of-war between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation is also found in Norman Shepherd, Lewis Sperry

6 The tension between James and Paul should not be understood as a sharp theological difference; rather, this needs to be grasped in the terminological difference regarding “works.” While “works,” for Paul, refers to the “works of the law,” which he rejects, “works” for James refers to genuine good deeds that result from the fruits of true faith. Peter Davids’ presentation about this is helpful: “In reality, both James and Paul had similar ideas on the role of good works in the Christian life, but since they ministered in different spheres socially and geographically, they addressed different concerns and used their overlapping terminology differently.” See Peter Davids, “James and Paul,” in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, eds. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 459. Cf. Eddy et al., “Justification in Contemporary Debate,” 72.

7 Norman Shepherd writes that “the exclusive ground of the justification of the believer in the state of justification is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but his [believer] obedience, which is simply the perseverance of the saints in the way of truth and righteousness, is necessary to his continuing in a state of justification.” See Norman Shepherd, “Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works,” 21 entry, presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, November 18, 1978, available from http://www.hornes.org/theologia/norman-shepherd/the-34-theses, accessed November 19, 2014. Therefore, in Shepherd’s understanding, there is a high possibility to arrive at a conclusion that obedience (works) functions as much as the instrumental cause as is faith. See also Shepherd, “The Relation of Good Works to Justification in the Westminster Standards,” 10-28, paper presented to the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, October 1, 1976, available from http://trinity-pres.net/essays/ns23-1976NSGoodWorksAndJustificationInTheWestminsterStandards.pdf, accessed November 19, 2014. Shepherd more recently argues about the conditionality of works, saying that “faith, repentance, obedience, and perseverance are indispensable to the enjoyment of these blessings [the new covenant]. They are conditions” (emphasis added). See Norman Shepherd, The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism (Phillipsburg: P & R Pub., 2000), 50. The spirit of Shepherdism is closely associated with Federal Vision theology or the Auburn Avenue Theology. Since Federal Vision theology per se is a huge topic, this study will not deal with it in detail. For the argument of Federal Vision and its debate, see J. Steven Wilkins and Duane Garner, eds., The Federal Vision (Monroe: Athanasius Press, 2004); E. Calvin Beisner, ed., The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision (Fort Lauderdale: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004).
Chafer, and in the Keswick movement. Broadly speaking, these all lay claim to some degree of human responsibility and activity in salvation, so their soteriology has been viewed as encroaching on God’s absolute sovereignty.

Thus the debate over the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in justification and sanctification has often proven contentious, with the proponents advancing their arguments strongly one way or the other. However, God’s sovereignty and human responsibility should both be seen as vital in salvation.

First, the distinctions between active and passive justification and between definitive and progressive sanctification serve to strike a proper balance. God’s absolute sovereignty is the “object” and human responsibility the “subject” in both justification and sanctification. The inseparability of object from subject is what unifies active with passive justification and definitive with progressive sanctification. God’s sovereignty in

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8 See, esp., vol. 7 of Chafer’s *Systematic Theology* and Ryrie, “Contrasting Views of Sanctification.” The Chaferian concept of sanctification involves in overconfidence in the sanctifying ability of humankind; as a result, it has often been charged as the “quintessence of Arminianism.” See Warfield, “Review of *He That Is Spiritual*,” 322-327. For a detailed exposition regarding the different perspectives on sanctification between Warfield and Chafer, see Gleason, “B. B. Warfield and Lewis S. Chafer on Sanctification,” 241-257.


10 In scholastic theology, one of the attempts to find a compromise between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility is the usage of *scientia media* (middle knowledge). In the contrasting context between predestination and human free will, Arminian thinkers advocate the idea of *scientia media*, inasmuch as they think that *scientia media* is placed between *scientia necessaria* and *scientia voluntaria* so as to guarantee creative space for the participation of human decision-making as part of God’s knowledge and will. Yet, the idea of *scientia media* cannot create a balance between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility as advocates claim; rather, *scientia media*, which essentially depends on future conditional contingencies, inevitably has a potential to lessen divine sovereignty. On this, see Jae-Eun Park, “John Plaifere (d.1632) on Conditional Predestination: A Well-mixed Version of *scientia media* and Resistible Grace,” *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 18.2 (2016): forthcoming.
its objective dimension is maintained in full measure, while human responsibility in its subjective dimension is also completely affirmed; there is no need or room for either antinomian or neonomian arguments.

Second, the causal relationship between active and passive justification and between definitive and progressive sanctification also serves to strike a proper balance. God’s sovereignty is the “cause” and human responsibility the “effect” in both justification and sanctification.11 Active justification and definitive sanctification are properly understood as the prima causa (first cause) and passive justification and progressive satisfaction the causa secunda (second cause) of salvation.12 The first cause is solely a divine promise and act which is objective and decisive, so the believer’s justification and sanctification stand not on precarious subjective ground, but on unshakable objective ground.

8.1.2. Securing an Appropriate Understanding of God’s Sovereignty in Salvation

Even apart from the historical Pelagian or Arminian perspectives, there have been several other fairly recent discussions among New Testament scholars undermining the idea of God’s absolute sovereignty in justification and final judgment. For example, several

11 Muller, Dictionary, 244 (s.v. prima causa): “[T]he first cause; viz., God as the cause of all things, i.e., the uncaused cause or noncontingent, necessary being whose causal activity sets in motion all contingent causes and their effects” (emphasis in the original).

12 Muller, Dictionary, 63 (s.v. causae secundae): “[S]econd causes; secondary, as distinct from and subordinate to primary causality, viz., the order of finite causality. It is a truism of scholastic theology that God does not act immediately, but mediate, through secondary or instrumental causes. The world does not experience sudden divine interventions but rather the effecting of the divine will in and through the finite order of the universe” (emphasis in the original).
writers, e.g., Kent Yinger, N. T. Wright, et al. have been influenced by “covenantal nomism,” arguing in varying degrees that even though divine righteousness and grace are the initial grounds for entry into the new covenant, believers’ obedience and adherence to the law are required in order to remain in the new covenant. For these scholars the experiential transformation of the individual based on continuing obedience and Spirit-led activity is the basis of justification and final judgment. Although he disagrees with Sanders’ covenantal nomism, Chris VanLandingham also argues that while the believer’s deeds throughout their lifetime are not viewed by God as merits per se, they are still criteria for justification at the last judgment. Those who see a close

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13 Covenantal nomism, which is claimed by E. P. Sanders, basically argues that the Judaism of the first century was not a legalistic religion. Rather than becoming God’s people through keeping the law or works of the law, Jewish people in the first century were already God’s people through God’s election and covenantal grace. Yet, for them, works were necessary in order to maintain their stand in that covenant. See E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 75, 420, 438-442, 544. Sanders’ argument is not totally new. The previous seed already exists in the thought of G. F. Moore and Albert Schweitzer. Cf. G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927); Albert Schweitzer, Die mystik des Apostels Paulus (Tübingen: Mohr, 1930).

14 Yinger writes: “[S]alvation is not earned by human initiative, but is given by God’s grace; and it is contingent upon continuance in the faith and obedience which are required by that relationship. Such obedience remains a condition for the maintenance of righteousness and for final justification. . . . [O]ne’s outward behavior (one’s work or way) will correspond to, and be a visible manifestation of, inward reality. The eschatological recompense according to deeds confirms, on the basis of deeds, one’s justification” (emphasis in the original). See Kent L. Yinger, Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 289-290. In a similar vein, Wright also clarifies that “this [covenantal theme] means that they are declared, in the present, to be what they will be seen to be in the future, namely the true people of God. Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly (according to [Rom] 2:14-16 and 8:9-11) on the basis of the entire life” (emphasis added). See N. T. Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 129. In the later writing, Wright expresses somewhat differently on what he said before: “The present verdict gives the assurance that the future verdict will match it; the Spirit gives the power through which that future verdict, when given, will be seen to be in accordance with the life that the believer has then lived” (emphasis in the original). See Wright, Justification, 251.

15 Chris VanLandingham, Judgment & Justification in Early Judaism and the Apostle Paul (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 15. He further maintains that “God’s grace and mercy may be present throughout a person’s life, working on his or her behalf; but one’s deeds determine approbation at the final judgment” (emphasis added). See VanLandingham, Judgment & Justification, 15.
relationship between human works and the final justification may not overtly teach a form of legalism or merit theology.\(^\text{16}\) Rather, they propose that one’s deeds are the way that one is walking in the Holy Spirit through faith.\(^\text{17}\) Their argument is worthwhile at least as a warning against pursuing “cheap grace.” Nevertheless, their language—specifically, on the basis of works, works determine, works confirm the future justification, etc.—may to lead to the erroneous conclusion that works might have some role in initiating justification. Justification is rooted in Christ and His imputed righteousness.\(^\text{18}\) Works cannot be the foundation nor even an instrumental cause of justification; they are merely a necessary confirmation of faith in Christ and manifest fruits of that faith.\(^\text{19}\) Also, if works were the basis of justification it would seriously weaken God’s sovereignty in salvation, which by definition is the gift of God alone based on His free will and pleasure. Works (genuinely good and moral deeds) are the grateful response of those who receive and enjoy God’s free gift by faith.

\(^\text{16}\) Yinger clarifies, “One’s works of obedience are not viewed as merits, each to be recompensed in atomistic fashion, but instead are the observable manifestations of the covenant loyalty of the unseen heart” (emphasis added). See Yinger, Paul, Judaism, and Judgment, 285.

\(^\text{17}\) Yinger, Paul, Judaism, and Judgment, 285. John Piper also acknowledges this point in Wright’s argument, saying that “[w]hen he [Wright] says ‘by work,’ he does not mean by legalism or by merit or by earning, but by the obedience of our lives that is produced by the Holy Spirit through faith.” See Piper, The Future of Justification, 104.

\(^\text{18}\) See WCF 11.1.2: “Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God” (emphasis added). See Schaff, ed., “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 626.

\(^\text{19}\) See Piper, The Future of Justification, 110; Gaffin, By Faith, Not by Sight, 98.
In sum, the ideas of active justification and definitive sanctification show that works cannot be the basis of justification and the final judgment. These also reinforce God’s sovereignty in redemption.

8.2. Practical Significance

The concepts of active justification and definitive sanctification not only have theological significance but have practical application as well. They provide believers with a sound sense of assurance and perseverance, and they allow the believer to overcome either spiritual triumphalism or defeatism.

8.2.1. Providing Sound Assurance and Perseverance

The distinctions between active and passive justification and between definitive and progressive sanctification recognize the objective and subjective dimensions of assurance and perseverance. Stated briefly, discussions revolve around (1) whether genuine assurance is based on objective grounds or subjective evidence; and (2) whether eternal security, the objective basis of perseverance, is permanent or not.

Several scholars including R. T. Kendall, Basil Hall, M. Charles Bell, et al. maintain that the doctrine of assurance of the post-Reformers resolves into experimental subjectivism, self-introspection, voluntarism, and anthropocentrism. However others,

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e.g., Beeke, Muller, Letham, et al. argue on the basis of WCF 18\textsuperscript{21} and Puritan or Reformed orthodox tradition that genuine assurance is grounded primarily in the divine truth of the promises in Christ, and only secondarily on the inward evidence of saving grace and the testimony or witness of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{22} These scholars contend that when post-Reformation writers employ \textit{syllogismus practicus}\textsuperscript{23} their syllogism is not dependent on man’s subjective ability or merit, but rather on God’s living Word, Christ,

\begin{scriptsize}\textit{and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance} (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1985).\end{scriptsize}

\textsuperscript{21} “. . . II. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God; which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption. III. This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it . . . IV. True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted . . . yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived, and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.” See Schaff, ed., “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 637-640 (WCF 18.2-4).


\textsuperscript{23} “The basis form of the \textit{syllogismus} (here taken from Francis Turretin) is as follows: \textit{Quisquis vere credit et resipiscit electus sit; Atqui ego credo, etc.; Ergo electus sum: ‘Whoever truly believes and becomes of a right spirit is elect; But in fact I believe, etc.; Therefore I am elect’ (\textit{Institutio theologiae}, IV. Xiii.4). This basis logical form, in a multitude of varieties drawn from studies of the problems and temptations of daily life, is also found in the Puritan casuistry of ‘cases of conscience,’ all of which were developed specifically for the sake of self-examination and personal assurance of salvation.” See Muller, \textit{Dictionary}, 293 (s.v. \textit{syllogismus practicus}).
and the work of the Spirit. Thus the believer’s real assurance is based on the object, but simultaneously on the subject, which is ultimately rooted in the object of faith. Scott Hafemann describes this duality of assurance in the context of perseverance when he writes: “[P]erseverance is visible in a real change of life in real people in the midst of the real world (Titus 2:14). Perseverance is not a continuing mental assent to the truth of events in the past; it is a continuing and active obedience to God’s will as the expression of a growing trust in his promises” (emphasis in the original). Genuine assurance is revealed not only in the essence of faith, but also in the fruit of faith. This leads to “once really saved, always saved, as seen precisely in what you do!” The core of genuine assurance includes the idea that even the subjective “what you do” is planted in the objective truth of the Word and divine promise of God.

The distinctions between active and passive justification and between definitive and progressive sanctification provide assurance of salvation. They speak of what the

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25 Yet, this does not mean that the objective ground is not the ultimate ground of assurance. D. A. Carson articulates: “The ultimate ground of assurance is never more than Jesus himself, Jesus and his death and resurrection on our behalf. The ground of Christian assurance is the object of Christian faith” (emphasis in the original). See Carl F. H. Henry et al., “What Are the Biblical and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of Assurance?,” The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 2 (Spring 1998): 67.


objective ground of assurance is and also *how* to remain assured in real life. If assurance is the inward evidence of the definitive working of the Holy Spirit that allows the justified believer to know that they have been saved, progressive sanctification continually displays the evidence of the Spirit in the justified believer’s life. What is more, active justification (*justified in foro Dei*) provides assurance of the believer’s legal status through the inner testimony of faith; this communicates to believers the objective reality of justification. In this sense active justification offers *ontological-objective* grounds for personal assurance. Still, genuine assurance is rooted in *both* the objective and the subjective, i.e., the active/definitive and the passive/progressive aspects of salvation.

With respect to the second question above, i.e., whether eternal security (the objective basis of perseverance) is permanent or not, the doctrine of assurance is closely related to the “perseverance of the saints.”

The idea of eternal security also provides the objective ground of personal assurance. Discussions on the validity of the doctrine of perseverance have for the most part been between the Calvinist and Arminian traditions. The debates come down to whether believers can fall away from salvation once they have been regenerated, justified, and adopted by God. The classical Calvinistic

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31 According to Grudem, the Reformed tradition prefers to use the term “perseverance of the saints”; the baptist tradition frequently uses the term “eternal security.” See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 789. Hoekema prefers to use the expression perseverance of “true believers” because he thinks that the term “saints” contains various meanings and is therefore ambiguous. See Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 236. In this study, the term “perseverance of the saints” and “eternal security” are interchangeably used.

teaching is, “They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”33 The Remonstrants, followers of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), answered: “True believers can fall from true faith and can fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; not only is it possible for this to happen, but it even happens frequently.”34 Opinions differ sharply because certain scriptural passages appear to support opposing sides, e.g., John 10:27-28 (the impossibility of falling way)35 and Hebrews 6:4-6 (the possibility of falling away).36 An effective way to reconcile John 10:27-28 with Hebrews 6:4-6 without weakening the message of either is to say that there

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34 This is Anthony Hoekema’s translation of the fifth article of the Sententiae Remonstrantium, which was delivered at the 34th session of the Synod of Dort, on December 17: “Vere fideles possunt a vera fide excidere et in istiusmodi prolabi peccata, quae cum vera et iustificante fide consistere non possunt; nec potest hoc tantum fieri, sed et non raro fit.” See Peter Y. De Jong, Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619 (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 228. For the full text of the Sententiae Remonstrantium, see The Synod of Dort, Acta synodi nationalis, in nomine Domini nostri Iesu Christi...Dordrechti habitae anno M.DC.XVIII. et M.DC.XIX (Hanau, 1620), 116-119. For the Arminius’ view on perseverance and the possibility of apostasy, see Keith D. Stanglin, Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 130-139. According to Stanglin, in contrast to the opinion that true believers could not possibly fall away from salvation, for Arminius it is possible for believers to lose faith. Yet, Stanglin further argues that “Arminius was less clear regarding whether apostasy actually happens.” See Stanglin, Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation, 141.

35 “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish [οὐ μὴ ἀπολῶνται]. No one will snatch them out of my hand.” Here John uses the double emphatic negative form οὐ μὴ with the aorist subjunctive to express the strongest possibility of not ever perishing. Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, John, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 311.

36 “For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt.”
is a logical possibility of falling away from salvation, but this cannot actually happen to true believers because the grace of God prevents them from falling away. This is the precondition that allows believers to persevere, i.e., they must be true and genuine believers beforehand. This is not fully achieved by human ability or effort per se. Rather, as the Canons of Dort clearly state (fifth head, art. 8), “It is not in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God’s free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings.” Thus, the very nature of perseverance is to believe in the greatness of God’s grace and its powerful efficacy throughout the life of the “true” believer.

Many critics of the doctrine of perseverance believe that the principle of “once saved always saved” could lead to moral self-indulgence and may promote a gospel of “laissez-faire.” Their objection is valid only if the doctrine is understood in the antinomian sense where the necessity of progressive sanctification is neglected in favor of the erroneous principle of “once justified, God does not see sin anymore.” However, the critics are mistaken if it is acknowledged that true believers who, having tasted the joy of the perseverance of the saints, perpetually struggle with sin throughout their entire

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37 Erickson, Christian Theology, 1005. Erickson further articulates: “Although they [true believers] could abandon their faith and consequently come to the fate described in Hebrews 6, the grace of God prevents them from apostasizing. God does this, not by making it impossible for believers to fall away, but by making it certain that they will not. Our emphasis on can and will not is not inconsequential. It preserves the freedom of the individual. Believers are capable of repudiating their faith, but will freely choose not to” (emphasis in the original). See Erickson, Christian Theology, 1005.

38 Hoekema, Saved by Grace, 235.


life while embracing the guidance of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{41} By definition active justification and definitive sanctification mean that true believers have met the necessary precondition for the perseverance of the saints; they are therefore inseparable from God’s grace. Thus through their objective dimensions active justification and definitive sanctification uphold the lifelong assurance of believers in their perseverance to glory.

8.2.2. Overcoming Spiritual Triumphalism and Defeatism

An erroneous view of justification and sanctification can lead to two additional practical problems. On one hand, spiritual triumphalism occurs when believers are convinced that God’s free grace alone justifies and sanctifies them, forgetting what people who have truly received that free grace still must do. Triumphalism is “defeated” when God brings to mind the dimensions of progressive sanctification and passive justification, thus allowing the believer to fully participate in the new life in Christ.

On the other hand, spiritual defeatism occurs when believers become frustrated due to the power of sin in their lives to the point that they forget who they really are and to whom they ultimately belong, i.e., the decisive and definitive justification and sanctification they have already received. While triumphalism is rooted in an antinomian view of justification as evidenced by spiritual arrogance, defeatism grows from an overdeveloped sense of guilt and compunction that forgets the believer’s once-for-all justified identity. Defeatism is “defeated” when God brings to mind the paramount place of active justification and definitive sanctification that occurs through the believer’s

\textsuperscript{41} Murray, \textit{Redemption, Accomplished and Applied}, 192.
union with Christ. This proclaims the certainty of the divine promise, i.e., the identity (holiness) and legal status (righteousness) of the true believer.

The Christ-centeredness of these ideas plays a decisive role in conquering both triumphalism and defeatism, inasmuch as believers are able to win the battle only when they lean entirely on Christ and His satisfactory work of atonement, not on their own effort or merit. There is no room left in the heart of the true believer for triumphalism or defeatism since Christ occupies that space.

Active justification and definitive sanctification also have practical ecclesiastical significance. Believers who are actively involved in church or other supposed spiritual activities may fall into a baseless triumphalism, but other believers may suffer defeatism due to hidden sin. The concepts of active/passive justification and definitive/progressive sanctification can be a steadying influence keeping them from falling into these debilitating spiritual states, reminding them of who they really are and what they can and should do in faith.

Spiritual defeatism is overcome when the believer is focused on the importance of active justification and definitive sanctification, and spiritual triumphalism is undone when the believer is reminded of the necessity of passive justification and progressive sanctification. These are valuable pastoral tools to aid church members who fall into either triumphalism or defeatism.

8.3. Summary

Active justification and definitive sanctification have theological and practical
significance in four areas. These concepts are theologically meaningful in that their inseparability and causal relationship provide the balance between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, and their objective dimensions reinforce God’s absolute sovereignty, refuting the idea that works might be the basis of justification in the final judgment. They are of practical benefit in that they provide assurance to the saints of their perseverance and provide pastors with the tools to reassure true believers who are uncertain of their salvation, and to exhort parishioners against spiritual arrogance.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

This study has been written in response to criticisms of the concepts of active justification and definitive sanctification. These objections fall into three categories: biblical, theological, and practical.

The first criticism claims that the concepts of active justification and definitive sanctification are biblically unsupported. Section 2.3.1 of this study shows that the meaning of Romans 6:2-14, specifically, “dead to sin” (v. 2), “old self was crucified” (v. 6), and “For whoever has died is freed from sin” (v. 7a), and 1 Corinthians 1:2 ηγιασμένοις (“to those who are sanctified”), and 1 Corinthians 6:11 ηγιάσθητε (“you were sanctified”), directly support the idea of definitive sanctification. This concept defines believers’ identity (who they really are) and lordship (whom they fundamentally belong to) in a way that matches the biblical texts. Section 3.2 of the study defines active justification as God’s divine commitment and promise to justify sinners on the basis of Christ’s righteousness just as Genesis 3:15 maintains.

The second criticism claims that the terms active justification and definitive sanctification cause theological confusion. This study argues that when these ideas are properly defined and presented they provide theological clarity, not confusion. This is demonstrated through four characteristics shared by active justification and definitive sanctification.

First, as examined in Herman Bavinck (chapter 4), the inseparability of active
and passive justification and of definitive and progressive sanctification answers the
objection that active justification contradicts justification *sola fide*, as well as the concern
that definitive sanctification might neglect the importance of progressive sanctification.
According to Bavinck, the believer’s “actual” justification is not terminated and realized
in the realm of active justification *in foro Dei*, but in passive justification *sola fide in foro
conscientiae* which rests on the objective ground of active justification. Active
justification does not contradict but rather provides the object of what is believed in
justification *sola fide*. In addition, Bavinck maintains that progressive sanctification rests
on the objective ground of definitive sanctification (*evangelische heiligmaking*—
“evangelical sanctification”) signifying that believers truly *are* saints in Christ. In this
regard, definitive sanctification does not minimize progressive sanctification but rather
provides the objective foundation for it by informing believers of their identity, namely,
who they really are in Christ. Thus active justification is distinct but inseparable from
passive justification, and definitive sanctification is distinct but inseparable from
progressive sanctification.

Second, Alexander Comrie (chapter 5) reveals the *decisive* and *objective* nature
of active justification and definitive sanctification. Active justification is often
misunderstood as identical to eternal justification, or regarded as the theological
foundation for antinomianism which neglects the aspects of passive justification and
progressive sanctification. This error is found in the hyper-Calvinism espoused by John
Brine (Section 3.4.3) and also in the English antinomianism held by John Eaton (Section
3.4.2). However, Comrie correctly maintains that the concepts of active justification and
eternal justification are not identical, for eternal justification would be viable only if the
distinction between active and passive justification is a temporal rather than logical order.

Moreover, when the decisive and objective reality of salvation is presented in “causal” language, namely, objective reality as the primary and efficient cause of subjective reality, the antinomian error which pays attention exclusively to objective reality while ignoring subjective reality is made null and void.

Third, Herman Witsius (chapter 6) highlights the Christ-centered nature of active justification and definitive sanctification, which is tightly bound to the believer’s union with Christ and His meritorious work. The critics assert that definitive sanctification produces confusion because there is no conceptual difference between forensic and definitive sanctification. They also cling to the idea that definitive and progressive sanctification merely serve to create two distinct moments in the ordo salutis. These objections are erased when definitive sanctification is correctly defined as the “condition” or “state” of sharing in and conforming to Christ’s perfect holiness in union with Him rather than as a part of a certain “order” or “sequence” in the ordo salutis (esp., chapter 2).

Fourth, in Abraham Kuyper (chapter 7), we see the understanding that God’s sovereignty in salvation is absolute. In his soteriology Kuyper dedicated himself to separate God’s complete salvific authority from the zeitgeist, which was deeply embedded in modern principles. Kuyper employed several distinctions to buttress the ideas of definitive sanctification and active justification, i.e., “perfect in parts” (volkomenheid in deelen) and “imperfect in degrees” (onvolkomenheid in trappen) or his fivefold and ninefold aspects of justification. His emphasis on God’s redemptive sovereignty is the core idea that infuses all four characteristics—i.e., inseparability,
objectivity or decisiveness, Christ-centeredness, and God’s absolute sovereignty, for all
are fundamentally designed to express a *God-driven* justification and sanctification.

The third criticism of active justification and definitive sanctification is that they
do not provide any practical benefit for believers. This study shows that these ideas are
practically and pastorally helpful to the believer and pastor (chapter 8). The distinctions,
causal relationships, and objective/subjective dimensions of active and passive
justification and definitive and progressive sanctification provide a practical theological
perspective for the believer to clearly comprehend the balance between God’s
sovereignty and human responsibility. That understanding provides not only a solid
foundation for the believer’s assurance of perseverance, but also the motivation for
withstanding spiritual triumphalism or defeatism.

Thus this study concludes that the concepts of active justification and definitive
sanctification are biblically warranted, theologically meaningful, and practically relevant,
resonating with the indisputable truth that ours is a truly *God-driven salvation. Soli Deo
gloria!*
THESES FOR PUBLIC DEFENSE

Theses Pertaining to the Ph.D. Dissertation

1. *No one other than God Himself* justifies and sanctifies!

2. Active justification and definitive sanctification affirm a uniquely and absolutely God-driven salvation.

3. Active justification and definitive sanctification are biblically supported.

4. Active justification and definitive sanctification bring theological clarity, not confusion, when properly understood and applied.

5. Active justification and definitive sanctification are of practical and pastoral benefit to the believer.

6. Active justification and definitive sanctification affirm that the believer’s justification and sanctification rest on an objective and decisive foundation that is inseparable from passive justification and progressive sanctification respectively.

7. Active justification and definitive sanctification are the objects of faith, revealing both the ability and the need for human responsibility and activity in salvation.

8. Active justification and definitive sanctification rely entirely on Christ’s perfect righteousness and holiness and are governed entirely by God’s sovereignty.

Theses Pertaining to the Ph.D. Coursework

9. The fundamental roots of the Donatists and Augustine’s treatment of them are not primarily doctrinal; they are actually a study in Christian discipline and practice, particularly Christian love.

10. Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) was an English Puritan whose understanding of God is considered by earlier scholars to be too abstract and rationalistic. However, a review of Charnock’s Christology, epistemology, and theology in *A Discourse of the Knowledge of God in Christ* shows that such criticism is unjustified.

11. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) affirms the objective aspect of atonement in his concept of “satisfaction and penal substitution” and the subjective aspect of atonement in his concept of *unio cum Christo*, thus maintaining a proper balance in his theology between objective and subjective atonement.
12. J. Denny Weaver’s criticism of satisfaction atonement and Joanne Carlson Brown’s “Divine Child Abuse” perspective on atonement are both unsound interpretations.

13. Schleiermacher’s soteriology is based on two philosophical strands, i.e., dialectic Neoplatonism and Romanticism. Here Christ’s redemption is seen not just as His act of liberation from sin, but also as the fulfillment of the coincidentia oppositorum (the coincidence of opposites) between the finite (individual) and the Infinite (whole) in the dynamic dialectical interrelationship between them.

14. Schleiermacher and Barth’s differences are best understood in the context of a philosophical vs. unphilosophical soteriology.

15. Theophilus Gale’s (1628-1678) proposal regarding “creation” and “providence” holds theology and biblical truth above Platonic philosophy while still attempting to harmonize Calvinism with Platonism, thus reflecting a philosophy of Reformed and Calvinistic Platonism.

16. Herman Bavinck’s (1854-1921) theme of “participation in creation” resurrects the traditional perspective on war in a uniquely practical way so as to reconcile it with his neo-Calvinistic background.

17. John Plaifere’s (d.1632) doctrine of predestination in Appello Evangelium (1651) is actually a type of conditional predestination since it fully embraces two important Arminian principles: scientia media and resistible grace.

**Miscellaneous Theses**

18. Producing this dissertation has required painstaking effort (with emphasis on the “pain”), but it is also the most rewarding and blessed work the author has ever done.

19. A mother’s prayer is spiritual joy, a wife’s perseverance is palpable joy, and a daughter’s presence is emotional joy. They are all gifts from God.
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