

# Balanced Christianity 3. Justification and Sanctification

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of balance between justification and sanctification, forgiveness and unforgiving spirit, and answered prayer.*

**Duration:** 33:49

**Scripture:** Matthew 18:34, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8, Ephesians 2:10, Hebrews 8:12

**Topics:** "Justification", "Sanctification"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the three tenses of salvation: past, present, and future, highlighting the need for repentance and faith in the foundation of forgiveness. It discusses the importance of forgiveness, repentance, and sanctification in the Christian life, stressing the balance between grace-based forgiveness and the pursuit of Christ-like purity. The sermon concludes with a call to purify oneself in anticipation of Christ's return, striving to be like Him.

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## Transcript

So, continuing our study about being balanced in our Christian life, I want to speak for the benefit of those who haven't heard me speak on this before, about two verses and three verses in Ephesians, chapter two. In Ephesians, in chapter two, the basis of our salvation, first of all, let me say that salvation in the Bible has got three tenses, past, present, future. Past is salvation from the penalty of sin or the punishment for sin.

That happens the moment we are really born again, our past is wiped out, our sins are forgiven. Salvation from the penalty of sin. Present tense is salvation from the power of sin.

That is something that is every day we need to experience. And then future is salvation from the very presence of sin. When Christ comes again, there won't be any more sin, no temptation.

So, salvation has got three tenses. I have been saved from the penalty of sin. I am being saved from the power of sin.

And I will be saved from the presence of sin. So, when we use the word saved, it has got all these meanings. All of it is by grace.

It's by grace that we are saved from the penalty of sin. By grace, we are being saved from the power of sin. And by grace, one day we will be saved from the presence of sin.

So, Ephesians 2.8 is speaking about that past. By grace, you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one should boast.

We all know this very well that forgiveness of sins is not based on any works that we do. So, that's the meaning of this verse. Not on the basis of works.

That means, I cannot do any work that will blot out a sin of my past. No amount of works can take care of my sin in the past. All our works are worthless to forgive sin.

It's a free gift of God, forgiveness. But then, once we have laid that foundation, you know the difference between the foundation and the superstructure of a building. This building has got two parts, foundation and superstructure.

The foundation is our forgiveness. The superstructure is the life that we live. And that's mentioned in verse 10.

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. So, what do we see here? First of all, for our forgiveness, there are no works. But for our life thereafter, there are many good works that God wants us to do.

And says, He's planned it beforehand that we should walk in those good works. So, here is a balance. In one area, no works.

In another area, plenty of works. And we need to understand that balance. And it's because people don't understand that balance that they get confused.

And to use an illustration, in the foundation of a building, we don't put any doors or windows. It's just stones. But in the superstructure, there are many doors and windows.

That's like saying, no works in the foundation, but plenty of works in the superstructure. So, in our Christian life, it's like a house. There's a foundation and a superstructure.

In the foundation, there are no works. But in the superstructure, plenty of works. In the foundation, no doors and windows.

In the superstructure, plenty of doors and windows, if you are building a skyscraper. And so, therefore, we should not, a lot of Christians get confused in this. They don't seem to bother about living a holy life.

They say, everything is by grace. I'm forgiven and accepted by grace. Don't mix up the foundation and the superstructure.

What you're talking about is the foundation. There are no works. But if you build a superstructure also with no works, it's like building a house without any doors and windows.

That's crazy. But that's exactly what a lot of Christians are doing. They haven't separated these two.

So, we need to be balanced in this area of no works in our justification, but plenty of works in our sanctification. The Bible speaks about justification and sanctification. Justification is our being accepted by

Christ.

Sanctification is our growth in holiness. So, let's look at these two separately. When we come to the Lord, we need to walk in the light and come into God's presence and acknowledge that we are sinners and believe that Christ is the only way of salvation.

We turn from our sin. Repentance is a very important part of our entire life. There must be repentance in the foundation and plenty of repentance in the superstructure as well.

It's not only in the foundation there's repentance. When we first preach the gospel to an unconverted person, you have to tell him, you got to turn from your sin. You see, we are all born facing the world and the devil and the flesh and our back to God.

Repentance means you turn 180 degrees and face God with your back to the sin and the flesh. Why is there different degrees of spiritual growth in different believers? It's because when they turn around, some turn 180 degrees completely, radically repent, they progress the fastest. And some turn 100 degrees or something, 90, 100 degrees, they got one eye there and one eye here.

Their repentance is not complete and therefore they're like premature babies, born after five or six months in the womb, struggling to survive. That's the condition of many believers. So it's very important that in your justification, in your initial experience of salvation, that you've turned around 180 degrees.

Lord, I've finished with everything that I know to be sin. I've finished with everything, every influence that's going to drag me to the world, including my old friends. When Noah came out of the ark, all his old friends were gone.

It was a completely new world that he came into and it's something like that when we are born again. If I still hang on to my old friendships, they will drag me back. Christ was a friend of sinners but he never allowed the sinners to pull him.

He pulled the sinners into salvation. We all have friends, unconverted friends from our unconverted days and I'm not saying you got to give them up but think of it like a tug of war. They are holding the other end of the rope and you were also that side once but now you come to this side of the rope and you're holding it this side and if you find that in your friendship with them that they are pulling you towards the world, you got to drop the rope, drop that friendship.

But if you find that you are pulling them towards Christ, hang on to it. That's the way to determine which friendship to retain and which friendship to give up when you get converted and if you don't follow that, one day you'll become a backslider just like them. So that's what radical repentance means.

I turn 180 degrees right around from what I know to be sin in my life and what I know to be worldly and what I know to be of the devil and I want God and I want to find my fellowship with God's people. But I also need to recognize that God not only forgives me, He tells me that I will not remember your sins anymore. You know all of us have done a lot of things that we are ashamed of.

We've all done things that we're ashamed of, every one of us. I mean we would be terribly ashamed if a videotape was shown here of our past life because we have sinned. Christ came to save sinners and He does not, He hides it all, He covers it up.

He says in Hebrews 8.12, a verse that every child of God must know, Hebrews 8.12. God says, I will be merciful to your sins, iniquities, I will not remember your sins anymore. It's very important to know that God does not hold your past against you once you have confessed it. Men may remember your past and you may remember it yourself but God says, I will not remember it.

I will not hold that against you. It's very, very important because if you're honest, you may find even believers who've been believers for many years, they look back to some terrible sins they committed in the past and they keep confessing it again and again and again and again, thinking that the more you confess it, the more God will forgive you. No, you needed, if you really repented from it, you needed to confess it only once and you probably confessed it a hundred times more than you needed to confess it because you're not sure whether God still remembers it.

That's why Hebrews 8.12 is a very, very important verse in the foundation of the Christian life. God says, I will not remember your sins anymore. It's a tremendous comfort for those of us, like all of us, we have a lot of things that we have done which we are ashamed of and I will not remember your sins anymore.

Not only that, the Bible also says that God has justified us in Christ. That's another thing which is not much understood. What does it mean to be justified in Christ? Romans 5.1 says, we are having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

Romans 5 and verse 1. Justified means just as if I'd never sinned. Declared righteous, clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Now for some of you, this may be a matter that you already know, but it's always good to be reminded.

Can you honestly say, I want to ask every one of you here, can you honestly say that when you look at your past, you're absolutely sure God does not remember any of it? That God looks at you as if you had never done all those things. I tell you, most believers don't live like that and that's part of the reason for their misery. They haven't understood what it means to be justified, declared righteous by Christ or clothed with Christ's righteousness.

We have to see ourselves like that. Not just forgiven. Forgiveness is, okay, the Lord says, I've forgiven you.

But more than that, I will not remember. And more than that, I've now clothed you with the righteousness of Christ. It's as if now you've never done those things.

Declared righteous, not just declared forgiven, but declared righteous. This is foundational. But if you don't get the foundation right, you know how a building can have a crack in the third floor and the problem is not there.

The problem is the foundation was not laid properly. And I've seen that with so many believers. They live with a guilt they need not carry on living with because they're not sure what God has done for them in Christ.

So the other thing I want to mention is, you will remember the things you did. Of course you will. We don't have any control over our memory.

Our memory, God doesn't hold us guilty for what we remember. You may remember every single evil thing you did from as far back as you can remember. Because you've been forgiven, doesn't mean you'll forget

them.

In the same way, when you forgive somebody, it doesn't mean you've forgotten what he did. To forgive somebody does not mean you have to forget what he did. Some people feel guilty about that.

I believe I've really forgiven that man. But I still remember what he did. Well, you can't do anything about that.

That's in your memory. Don't feel guilty about that. When it comes to your mind, you reject it.

Do you know that God also has not forgotten your sins? Think of that. God doesn't say, I've forgotten what you did. How can that be? If I remember it, how can God forget it? Is my memory better than God's? No.

So you've got to read scripture carefully. He does not say, I've forgotten what you did in the past. He says, I choose not to remember.

I will not remember is different from saying, I've forgotten. God hasn't forgotten anything. He and you and I remember every single thing, wretched thing we did in the past.

But God says, I will not remember it. I choose not to remember. And I say, Lord, since you choose not to remember, I choose not to remember either.

I just agree with God. But it'll be in my memory. It's in God's memory.

Definitely. And I'll tell you when God brings it back. Let me show you when God brings back that which he has chosen to overlook.

If you turn to Matthew chapter 18, he speaks about a king, a story that Jesus said, a king who forgave a slave a huge amount, let's say it's a huge amount, a hundred million dollars, say something like that. Matthew 18 verse 24, 25, 26. That man said, please forgive me, king.

I'll pay it back. Why could he pay back a hundred million dollars? He couldn't. And the king said, so it's forgiven.

I've released you. You don't know how to pay it. A hundred million dollars forgiven.

Go free. He went out happy and he went outside and he found another friend of his, a fellow slave who owed him a hundred dollars. Now remember, he's just come out from the king's presence having been forgiven.

One hundred million dollars. And he meets another fellow slave who owes him a hundred dollars. A hundred dollars is not a small amount of money.

It's not like 50 cents or something. So he says, you better pay up. And he says, listen, please give me a chance.

I'll give me some time. He says, no, you got to pay up right now. Otherwise I'll take you to court.

And he gets him locked up in jail and put in prison. Some others saw this and went back to the king and said, do you know that guy you forgave a hundred million dollars? He went out and caught somebody by the throat who owed him a hundred dollars. And he got him thrown into the jail.

King said, call him back here. And he tells him in verse 32, you wicked slave. I forgave you a hundred million dollars.

This guy owed you a hundred dollars. You couldn't forgive him. What is the meaning of this parable? You know, every sin that somebody may have committed against you in the world, we have all experienced.

People have harmed us, cheated us, spoiled our name, deprived us of things and created problems for us or for your family members, your sons or daughters or whatever it is. And they did harm. There's no doubt.

It's the harm they did to you. But when compared with what you did against God, it's one millionth or less. What you owe to God is more than a hundred million dollars, probably a trillion.

And here what this guy owes you compared to that is probably one dollar. And you can't forgive him. And what does the king do? The king says, I unforgive everything that I forgave you.

Is there such a thing as unforgiving what is already forgiven? Yes, there is. Because Jesus said, so shall my heavenly father do to you. Because he told this man, okay, now your hundred million dollars are back on your head.

And not only back on your head, I'm going to put you in a special prison. You were going to go into an ordinary prison earlier. But because you couldn't forgive this man, you're going to be put in a special prison, verse 34, where I'll get some torturers to torture you every day.

Those are the demons who harass a person. That's the meaning of it. And my heavenly father, verse 35, will do that to you if you do not forgive your brother or your sister from your heart.

So that means God doesn't, God didn't forget about your debt to him. You had a huge debt to him, which he forgave. But then he saw that you went out and caught a fellow and wouldn't forgive somebody some small little thing he did against you.

God says, okay, I haven't forgotten your massive debt. I put it back on your head. And I will also allow the demons to come in trouble with all types of problems in your body, harass you.

And that teaches us clearly that God does not forget what he has forgiven. But he says, I will not remember. And the only condition where he does remember it again is when you don't forgive somebody else.

Not when you commit adultery or even murder. Those are sins you must repent of. But the only condition where he says, I won't forgive, I will remember all that you did is if you don't forgive somebody else.

So that, therefore I say, we don't realize that an unforgiving spirit in that sense is even worse than adultery and murder. Because after you're born again, you go and commit adultery and you repent and say, okay, God says, okay, you're forgiven, forget it, let's move on. But if you don't forgive someone, God says, that I won't let go.

I read to repeat this because so many believers have not seen the seriousness of an unforgiving spirit. Jesus said, my heavenly father will do that to you if you don't forgive your brother from your heart. How do you know whether you've forgiven your brother from your heart? I remember once, you know, we always want to obey God and forgive people when they've done wrong against us.

And I try to do that. Forgive does not mean I have to go in fellowship with that person. I may never meet him in all my life.

I may never want to visit his house because he's a troublesome person. And when the Bible says, pursue peace with all men, sometimes the best way to pursue peace with a coddlesome person is never to visit him. That's the best way to pursue peace.

So forgiveness doesn't mean I've got to go and meet him or fellowship with him or any such thing. It's an act of my will by which I say, Lord, I do not hold anything against him. With my will, I say, I have forgiven him.

I've forgiven her. What they did was wrong, but you've forgiven me much more. So I forgive.

But if later on, you heard that something bad happened to him, and you feel happy, that's the time you discover you didn't forgive him from your heart. Or you discover something good happened to him. Very good.

And you feel a bit unhappy. That's the moment you discover that you didn't forgive him from your heart. No problem.

Just go to God and say, Lord, I discovered just now that I didn't forgive that person from the heart. I want to forgive that person of my heart so that I don't want to feel happy when something good happens to him. I don't want to feel happy when something bad happens to him.

Who feels happy when something bad happens to someone? Is it God? No, it's the devil. Only the devil feels happy when something bad happens to someone. And I don't want to have any fellowship with the devil.

Whenever you feel good about something bad happening to someone, do you know that at that moment, you're having a little contact with Satan? Satan says, ah, that's it. Enjoy that. That guy's having a miserable time.

I want you to enjoy that. You know how he hurt you so badly those years ago? Now he's reaping it. Enjoy it.

Who's telling you that? Not God. The devil. God says, forgive him from your heart.

So thank God for such occasions where God shows us where we have not forgiven someone from the heart and say, Lord, I'm sorry that I had that attitude. I don't want to rejoice in his misfortune. And I don't want to be unhappy in his good fortune.

I want to forgive him from my heart. And I want to wish him the best. Even though he's done a lot of evil to me.

I've done a million times more evil against you. The way to forgive is to recognize how much God has forgiven you. This is such an important matter.

That's why I keep stressing it. I keep preaching it everywhere I go because I find hardly anybody preaches that you won't be forgiven if God doesn't forgive. God won't forgive you if you don't forgive others.

The other thing is, this is the reason also for a lot of unanswered prayer. You know that Jesus taught us in Mark chapter 11 that you can speak to a mountain to move. If it is God's will, if that mountain is hindering God's purpose for your life, it says in Mark 11 23, you speak to that mountain and tell it to be taken out and cast into the sea and it'll be granted.

But two things, when you pray, believe that God hears you. But also, verse 25, forgive people at that moment. So he's saying here in connection with answered prayer, one thing, he doesn't say repent of your adultery or murder and all these things, we repent immediately.

But we don't classify an unforgiving spirit in the same evil level as adultery and murder. Because you can't commit adultery and not feel guilty. That's impossible.

Even an unbeliever feels guilty. You can't murder somebody and not feel guilty. But you can have an unforgiving spirit and not feel guilty at all.

Do you know the number of believers who live like that? Who would immediately feel guilty even if they watch pornography. But they don't feel guilty when they have an unforgiving spirit. And that's why the Lord stresses that.

It's very important for you to forgive. And I believe this is something you see, because we're living in a world where all the time there could be people doing us harm. Sometimes deliberately, sometimes accidentally.

In our office, our neighborhood, relatives and we're dealing with so many people and there could be knowingly or unknowingly people do harm to us and we have to have an attitude of forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness. Okay. I'm not saying you should have fellowship with them.

Let me repeat that. No, you don't have to fellowship with them. If somebody raped you, you don't, you've got to forgive, but you don't have to go and meet that person again.

Stay miles away from that person. But you're not going to solve any problem by having bitterness. Bitterness doesn't solve your problem.

You're still being hurt, injured and molested. Forgive and put it behind you and you can live a better life. But if you, he's already harmed you in some way by molesting you or raping you, you don't forgive him, you're harming yourself even more.

It's foolish, really. It's like trying to hurt him by drinking poison yourself. It's crazy.

That is what an unforgiving spirit is. That's why it's so very important and I never get tired of emphasizing, you have to forgive. That's the foundation.

And on that, we build a superstructure of sanctification. Forgiveness comes through repentance and faith. Sanctification, as I said, is a progressive thing.

And in this progression, as God gives us light, we have to judge ourselves. That's why after we have repentance as an unbeliever, we need to have repentance as a believer. The last word that Jesus spoke to the church is in Revelation 2 and 3, repent.

To five churches he said, repent, repent, repent, repent. That was not spoken to unbelievers. It was spoken to believers.

So believers need to repent. And that was such a serious thing and I want to see some of the warnings he gave to the churches in these revelations. They're pretty serious warnings.

So I hear that call from Jesus coming to a believer like me. I need to repent and I need to live in the light of God and ask him to show me if there's anything in my life today. Now I'm building the superstructure.

My forgiveness is clear. I know that God doesn't remember my past. I'm clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

I'm accepted before him. I'm sitting like a two-year-old on his lap and I'm calling him father. And now I'm building the superstructure and I need to repent again.

Because there could be things in my life I get light on now, which I did not have light on five years ago. This is the way. Somebody asked me once, Brother Zak, how do you know God's blessing you? I said, I'll tell you.

That he shows me areas of unchristlikeness in my life, which I never knew before. Which all these I lived in ignorance of. That is how I know I'm growing.

It's like students studying mathematics and saying, hey, I discovered areas of mathematics I never knew last year. And he goes to the next grade and says, boy, I'm discovering new areas of mathematics I never knew last year. And that's progression all the way to 10th grade in graduate studies, discovering areas of mathematics he never knew before.

The Christian life is like that. There's a whole lot of unchristlikeness in all of us. And we need to discover that as we progress and God will show you the next step.

Only if you have been honest about the step he's already shown you. Like, you know, you get promoted to the next grade only if you're passed in the first grade, then you go to the next one and so on. So this is the balanced Christian life.

I've repented, I've laid the foundation in my life, but that's not enough. I have to grow spiritually and that growth also comes through repentance, through discovering as God shows us areas in our life which are unchristlike. I'm not afraid of going to hell now, but I'm afraid of displeasing God in my life.

And so the Bible says in the household of God, 1 Peter chapter 4 says, we judge ourselves. 1 Peter 4 17. To me, this is one of the marks of being in the family of God.

1 Peter 4 17 says, the time has come for judgment to begin in the household of God. And if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for others? Notice that expression, us first. Where do we put ourselves first? The Bible teaches us to put others first in everything.

In the world, people put themselves first, except in the area of judgment. There they put others first. They judge others.

Every other area, they put themselves first. But when we become Christians, it gets reversed. We put others first.

But when it comes to judgment, we put ourselves first. So if you're a person who's always judging others, you're really behaving like an unbeliever. Here it says, we judge ourselves first.

We say, Lord, show me what's wrong in my life. Help me to see where I'm un-Christ-like. The only person who doesn't need to ask that is the one who feels he's already become completely like Christ.

None of us have become like Christ yet. So judgment begins with us first in the family of God. And I've often used this verse to show that this is the mark that you're in the family of God.

You're in the family of God, if you're one of those who judge yourself first. Say, Lord, show me where I need to be a little more Christ-like. And that is how we go from one step to another progression.

So this is what I mean by understanding this balance between foundation and superstructure. There are no works in the foundation we are freely forgiven. But in the superstructure, there are many works.

Works of repentance again, of judging ourselves and progressively becoming more and more like Christ. Let me read these words in conclusion. In 1 John chapter 3 and verse 2, it says, we are already children of God.

That we are sure of. But it's not yet clear what we will become. When Christ comes, we'll become like him.

When he appears, this is the hope we have. We shall be like him. And we shall see him as he is.

Now many Christians only think of, we shall see him as he is. That's our hope. But here it says our hope is double.

We shall see him as he is. And we shall be like him. Now how do you know whether you have this hope or not? All of us may say, I have this hope.

Hang on. It says in this verse 3, the proof that you have this hope of the second coming of Christ is, that you purify yourself to his level of purity. So these are verses we hear very little of in Christendom.

One of the ministries we have in this church anyway, is to proclaim those things that are not generally proclaimed on Christendom. You can go to the internet and listen to the YouTube Christian messages. You'll hardly hear some of the things that we preach here.

But it's from scripture. That every single Christian, verse 3, not a few, every single Christian who has the hope of seeing Christ face to face, will purify himself to the level of Christ's purity. What about if you don't purify yourself to the level, pursuing the purity of Christ? According to this verse, it proves you really don't have the hope.

You've got an intellectual hope of Christ coming back. But it's not a living hope in your heart. If you have a living hope, gee, my savior is coming back and I'm going to be like him.

It says here, you will purify yourself. You will eagerly seek to cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit in the fear of God. And this is what we do in the church.

And as we purify ourselves, our effectiveness will be more and more and more. It will be a greater blessing to others. So our calling is this.

We don't pretend that we have become like Christ. We will not become like Christ till he comes back. But our desire is to progress towards that.

Our destination is to become like Christ completely. So we don't live satisfied with the fact that our sins are forgiven and we're on our way to heaven. The balanced Christian life is where I know I'm fully accepted by God.

At the same time, I recognize there are areas in my life that aren't Christ-like that I need to keep on cleansing myself till Christ comes again. It is that type of balanced Christian who manifests increasingly the beauty of Christ in his life. The beauty of Christ's humility and graciousness and kindness and gentleness and goodness that draws other people to Christ.

And that is the whole purpose of the ministry in the church to make us more and more like him. So I believe that every true Christian would want to be in a church that encourages him to go in this direction. That's the whole purpose of every church meeting.

And I pray that all of you will find a church like that where you're encouraged to go in this direction week by week and year by year. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we bow before you, there are a lot of things we heard today and I pray that it'll bring forth fruit in our lives, fruit that lasts for eternity.

And remind us again and again, because we need to be reminded again and again, Lord, of the things that have eternal value. We pray you'll help us each one. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Thank you.

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