

Was Ellen White Confused About Justification?

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Since the Protestant Reformation, the customary position of Protestantism has been that justification is by faith alone, plus nothing. Thus, one prominent Adventist author wrote, approvingly, “Reformers taught that justification was something that God does *for* us not *in* us—a crucial distinction . . .”¹

Many Seventh-day Adventists stand on this platform. Thus, we have statements such as, “We’re justified only by what Christ did for us, apart from us, outside of us.”² Is justification, then, only legal, declarative, forensic? Is there no experiential element?

Many would answer, no, there is not.

Ellen White said, yes, there is, on a number of occasions.

Now, before some throw up their hands in bafflement and exclaim, “But this is rank Catholicism,” let us explore the matter, hopefully with an open, receptive, mind.

Ellen White’s several statements on this subject have caused some puzzlement for those who have considered them. They appear to be at variance with the dominant Protestant position. Some might say they vary even from much that she herself has written on the subject. It has even been suggested that when she wrote them she was somewhat mixed up in her understanding of justification and sanctification and did not get her concepts straightened out until she hit on an insight, found in *Messages to Young People*, that she penned in 1895: “Righteousness within is testified to by righteousness without. . . . The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified

¹ Clifford Goldstein, “By Grace Alone?” *Adventist Review* (June 22, 2000): 9.

² *Ibid.*

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is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.”³

The implication is, then, that when she penned those words she had begun to think of imputation as exclusively legal, and impartation as referring to the changed life of the individual subsequent to justification. She did not confuse the roles of justification and sanctification in her writings from that time on, some hold. But did she really confuse them before this?

It has also been suggested that she could make mistakes, as Nathan was mistaken when he encouraged David to build the temple, only to find the idea vetoed by God. No doubt she could, and did, make similar mistakes. But that would be a case of personal judgment, not of mistaken inspiration, just as Nathan’s mistake was one of personal judgment. And Ellen White observed, regarding her writings: “I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision—the precious rays of light shining from the throne.”⁴

As T. Housel Jemison wrote, “Trying to make distinctions, except with everyday experiences and biographical accounts, is dangerous. It involves setting up one’s own judgment as a criterion in place of the clear declaration of the messenger whom he claims to believe is inspired. If the word of the messenger cannot be accepted, then none of the messages should be accepted as being of God.”⁵

Manifestly, Ellen White did refine and more plainly express her ideas as time went on, but she did not change them fundamentally in any way.

Continuing our discussion of justification, we note that in his book, *Messenger of the Lord*, Herbert Douglass posits that as a first rule of interpretation one must embrace the wider context and, “Include all that the prophet has said on the subject under discussion before coming to a conclusion.”⁶ Agreeing with this rule, we must therefore include, in our understanding of Ellen White’s view of justification, the quotations under consideration.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Young People* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1930), 35.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:67.

⁵ T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1955), 398.

⁶ Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 1999), 394.

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This being so, it would seem she uses the term justification in two senses. The first usage may be understood in the generally accepted sense of the sinner being declared right, objectively regarded by God as being righteous through Christ's righteousness credited to him.

The grace of Christ is freely to justify the sinner without merit or claim on his part. Justification is a full, complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving grace.⁷ "If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Savior, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned."⁸

With this understanding virtually all Christians are in accord.

It is in connection with Ellen White's second usage of justification that problems arise, for here she uses it subjectively, in a way that is not merely attributive but is also experiential.

If you pray in sincerity, surrendering yourself, soul, body, and spirit, unto God, you put on the whole armor of God, and open the soul to the righteousness of Christ; and this alone,—Christ's *imputed* righteousness,—makes you able to stand against the wiles of the devil.⁹

Christ clothed His divinity with humanity, and endured the test upon the point of appetite, ambition, and love of the world, thus making it possible for man to keep the commandments of God through his *imputed* righteousness.¹⁰

He who obeys the law through the *imputed* righteousness of Christ, meets every claim that the Bible presents; . . .¹¹

These are but three of a number of similar statements. These statements merit our consideration.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1973), 107.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1982), 62.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1955), 346; emphasis added.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times* (June 18, 1894), 3:125; emphasis added.

¹¹ October 1, 1894, 3:153; emphasis added.

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As we have noted, much of Protestantism has insisted that justification is an outside-of-you legal arrangement that does nothing for one experientially. But there are some, a growing number, who believe that the nature of the Reformation controversy with Catholicism forced an emphasis that was actually an imbalance of the true meaning of that term. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that Luther himself did not insist on the exclusively legal aspects of justification, as some have held he did.

In his study *Luther on Justification*, Robin A. Leaver wrote that Luther “did not teach that when an individual simply comes to believe that he is justified his salvation is sure, without any reference to the personal presence of the indwelling Christ.”¹² He quotes Luther as writing,

“Among the distinguished teachers there are some who say that forgiveness of sins and justification by grace consist entirely of divine imputation, that is, in God’s accounting it sufficient that he to whom He reckons or does not reckon sin is justified or not justified from his sins by this.” Luther goes on to characterize this as a “horrible, terrible understanding.”¹³

That biblical justification is legal, forensic, no Bible student will deny. In fact, it has to be. To quote Phillips’ paraphrase of Romans 3:20: No man can justify himself before God by a perfect performance of the Law’s demands—indeed it is the straight-edge of that Law that shows us how crooked we are.” So there is no other way to be justified, except through Christ’s perfections accounted to us. We are justified freely by grace through the blood of Christ (Romans 3:24; 5:9,16). Whatever is ours by grace is always absolutely unearned and undeserved.

We earlier observed that some have suggested that Ellen White was somewhat mixed up in her understanding of justification and sanctification at the time she penned the quotations under discussion. But if justification is always only judicial, and the experiential is found only in sanctification, and if imputation always connotes only a legal declaration, Ellen White continued to be confused for some time after she wrote the statement found in *Messages to Young People*. For example, she wrote, in 1896, the Savior “testifies that through His *imputed* righteousness the believing soul shall obey the commandments of God”¹⁴ And in May of

¹² Robin A. Leaver, *Luther on Justification* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 58.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, January 16, 1896 (3:264); emphasis added.

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the same year she wrote, “Let perfect obedience be rendered to God through the *imputed* righteousness of Christ, . . .”¹⁵ So she hadn’t “caught on” a year later, it appears.

But there is another problem involved with that argument. If Ellen White was herself unclear, naive, in that area, the question arises that is often asked under similar conditions: Can we be sure she was not mistaken in others? At this point all we do is testify to our belief in the inspiration and dependability of the Spirit of Prophecy as manifested in Ellen White’s writings.

In that same year, 1896, her important book *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* was published. On page 114 we read,

God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which he sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart.

She here uses the term forgiveness, but this must subsume justification, because she wrote, “Pardon [forgiveness] and justification are one and the same thing.”¹⁶ Thus we read, “To be pardoned in the way that Christ pardons, is not only to be forgiven [justified], but to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.”¹⁷

Of course, this insight of pardon and justification being synonymous is not unique with Ellen White. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*¹⁸ maintains that, in the apostle John’s writings, “the confession of sins that leads to forgiveness seems only another name for the justification that brings peace.” And it states that Paul “rarely uses the term ‘forgiveness,’ but in its place prefers ‘justification.’ They are to his understanding practically synonymous.”¹⁹

In fact, the notion that justification is always only a legal pronouncement is not in tune with some recent theological thought. The evangelical author John R. W. Stott insists that the teaching that we are justified *in* Christ, “makes it impossible for us to think of justification as

¹⁵ Ibid., May 28, 1896 (3:296).

¹⁶ F. D. Nichol, editor, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:1070.

¹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), 3:190.

¹⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromily, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:1171.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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a purely external transaction.”²⁰ And the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, states that justification is “the *cleansing* and putting on of the new man ‘created in... holiness’ (Eph. 4:24. Emphasis supplied.)”²¹ The theologian Joachim Jeremias wrote, “God’s acquittal [justification] is not only forensic, it is not an ‘as if’, . . . It is the beginning of a new life, a new existence, a new creation through the gift of the Holy Spirit.”²²

Returning to Ellen White’s understanding of justification, we note again a statement we quoted earlier—*Steps to Christ*, p. 62—to demonstrate her view. She affirms that if we surrender our lives to Christ, taking Him as our Savior, no matter how sinful we may have been, His character is accepted in place of ours and God sees us as though we had committed no sin. This is forensic justification. But immediately she merges the subjective seamlessly with the forensic:

More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the constant surrender of your will to Him; and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.²³

It will generally be agreed that transformation, sanctification, begins simultaneously with justification. But that this transformation *is connected with justification* is the difficulty. For, as we have observed, by many it seems to be settled that the Bible teaches that justification is only accounted.

But is this so? Does the Bible clearly and consistently show that the terms translated by justification or related words are always forensic?

In important respects the answer is a theological, not a linguistic one. And often one’s theology depends on one’s educational bias, philosophy, preconceptions, and spiritual experience. As Frederick Buechner has observed, one’s theology is “essentially autobiography.”²⁴

²⁰ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1986), 119.

²¹ 6:88.

²² Quoted by W. T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, Willard H. Taylor in *God, Man, and Salvation* (Kansas City: Beacon House, 1977), 399.

²³ *Steps to Christ*, 62-63.

²⁴ Pastor and novelist Frederick Buechner wrote, in *The Alphabet of Grace* (1970), that “at its heart most theology, like most fiction, is essentially autobiography.”

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So if we ask, “What does the Greek say?” linguistics does not always solve the problem. The answer frequently depends on the person interpreting the Greek. To no small degree the meaning one accepts often depends on one’s theological leanings. This is so in the case of the words associated with justification in the Bible.

An example of theological bias may be seen in the exegesis of the word *katargethe* in Romans 6:6, translated “destroyed” in the KJV. One exegete holds that the word translated to destroy “does not mean to suppress, to weaken, or to render inactive—it means the destruction, the removal, the demolition of something which stands in the way.”²⁵ Another insists it means “to put out of commission or effect. It is made too strong when it is rendered: to destroy, to annihilate.”²⁶ Obviously, the theological stance of each expositor influenced his understanding. So it is with the understanding of justification.

The key term in resolving our difficulty with justification is *dikaio-sune*. This word actually has a very wide range of meaning,²⁷ which tells us its interpretation in a particular text often depends not only on linguistics and context, which do not always resolve the problem, but also, sometimes determinably, on one’s theological bent.

The Greek lexicographers Thayer and Arndt-Gingrich and others inform us that in Paul’s writings *dikaio-sune* refers to character. “In Paul,” says Thayer, it is “the state acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through the faith by which he embraces the grace of God offered him in the expiatory death of Jesus Christ”²⁸ He defines one of its meanings as “denoting the characteristics of the *dikaio-s*: righteousness, uprightness,” “the characteristics required of men by God.”²⁹ The Presbyterian theologian A. A. Hodge observes, in connection with Romans 8:3,4, that *dikaio-sune*, righteousness, “is the character of the *dikaio-s* [the

²⁵ Donald S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon House, 1971), 143.

²⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1945), 402.

²⁷ R. V. C. Tasker, ed., Tyndale N.T. Commentaries, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 280, footnote.

²⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 149.

²⁹ William F. Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957), 195.

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righteous one], that in him which satisfies the law.”³⁰ The context supports this.

The *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, in its comments on Galatians 2:17,³¹ quotes Arndt-Gingrich in reference to sinners being “acquitted, . . . pronounced and treated as righteous [which is legally justified], and thereby become *dikaios* (righteous), [and] *receive* the divine gift of *dikaiosune* (righteousness).” It then goes on to observe,

This reflects the modern swing from a purely forensic understanding . . . (which could, at extremes, resemble legal fiction). . . . [I]t is important to realize that being ‘put right’ with God [being justified] involves a subsequent total change in our moral behavior (though this of itself could never commend us to God.)

He who becomes *dikaios* (righteous) by faith, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains, receives by faith God’s *dikaiosune* (“the righteousness bestowed by God,”³²) into his life as the “power and salvation of God.”³³ *dikaiosune*, then, refers to the righteous qualities³⁴ “the Power of the New Life,”³⁵ the believer receives with justification.

There is a word in the two preceding quotations that is the key to the resolution of our problem. That word is *power*.

When the thrust of the more than two dozen Spirit of Prophecy quotations are examined—the quotations which refer to righteousness, grace, and power as being *imputed* in justification—an interesting common concept emerges. In each of them the explicit or implicit idea is *empowerment*. “His imputed grace and power he gives to all who receive Him by faith.”³⁶ “‘Without me ye can do nothing;’ but in him, and through His righteousness *imputed* to us, we may do all things.”³⁷ “Every true Christian will be strong, not in the strength and merit of his good

³⁰ Archibald A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 262.

³¹ Tyndale NT Commentaries, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 80-81.

³² Arndt-Gingrich, 196

³³ Geoffrey W. Bromily, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 3:171.

³⁴ Colin Brown, ed., *New International Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3: 354.

³⁵ *TDNT*, 174.

³⁶ White, *Ms. Release* (Silver Spring: E. G. White Estate, 1996), 6:341.

³⁷ *Review and Herald*, July 1, 1890, 2:407.

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works, but in the righteousness of Christ, which through faith is *imputed* to him.”³⁸

As in creation God “spoke and it was” (Ps. 33:9), so when God pronounces a person justified, it is not only declarative, but dynamic.

The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature, and recreates the soul in the image of God.³⁹

“The word of God is . . . dynamic. It is filled with a power which is felt by those who receive it.”⁴⁰ “The words of the Lord always had the power appropriate to their particular character, and were effective for their particular purpose.”⁴¹ We earlier quoted J. Jeremias, who averred that scripture is “not a mere word, but it is God’s word that works and creates life. God’s word is always an effective word.”

This, I suggest, is what Ellen White means to convey in her statements in question about imputed justification, and in similar statements in which imputed seems to some to be used in an unusual way.

“Through faith in His name He *imputes* unto us His righteousness, and it becomes a living principle [power] in the life . . .”⁴²

Ellen White does not place the concept of “empowering” exclusively with sanctification, for sanctification is possible *only as a result of the empowering*. The empowering must therefore precede sanctification. She couples empowering with justification because the power accompanies justification, it coexists with it, it makes it the dynamic, “effective word.” As light emanates from the sun, that power emanates from justification. Thus, when God declares a person right, it is not simply a legal pronouncement to be recorded in some celestial book which registers a change in status. The declaration, because the Word of God is powerful, produces a change in state. Now, as a result of God’s empowering imputed righteousness, sanctification, as a process, begins immediately. It is initiated by justification. So Ellen White could write, “Justification

³⁸ *That I May Know Him* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1964), 150.

³⁹ *Education* (Mountain View : Pacific Press, 1942), 126.

⁴⁰ *TDNT*, 508.

⁴¹ Alan Richardson, ed., *Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1957), 284.

⁴² White, *That I May Know Him*, 302; emphasis supplied.

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means that the conscience, purged from dead works, is placed where it can receive the blessings of sanctification.”⁴³

In a definitive study on “Salvation” by Ivan Blazen in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*,⁴⁴ we read,

Justification is a far more powerful reality than a mere legal adjustment in the books of heaven. It is a dethroning of the illegitimate authority that prevents a sanctified life, and the establishment of that divine authority that enables it.

Thus, on the basis of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, I accept that frequently, whether in the immediate context Ellen White refers to imputed righteousness (justification or pardon) as judicial or subjective, the other meaning may be understood as intrinsic.

So what do we conclude? That it is indeed by faith alone through grace that God sees us, declares us, accepts us, as righteous. But the result of that declaration is not, cannot be, simply a legal position. Because God’s word is always dynamic, justification carries with it a galvanic spiritual energy that transforms those justified by faith.

Concurring with this, Blazen writes of justification “as the source of sanctified living.”⁴⁵

On the basis of this study we may conclude that justification is not only forensic, judicial, and legal, but also subjective and experiential.

But this fact need not be seen as in some way diminishing the forensic aspect. One of my correspondents, in defending the “outside-of-me” only position, wrote, “The forensic act of the Judge in acquitting me becomes the most fabulous experience in the world, and it can only be that fabulous an experience because it is forensic. I could simply not believe in it, I’d always be doubting it, if it was all staged in me; if it was not the outside-of-me act of the Judge Himself.”

But could not one respond, of the subjective and experiential aspect of justification: I agree totally and without qualification that God’s gracious act in pronouncing me and accounting me utterly innocent in His sight is a fabulous, utterly unmerited act—but is there more?

I am reminded of an account of two footsoldiers in the days of chivalry arguing about the color of the shield of a certain knight. One insisted

⁴³ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:908.

⁴⁴ Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 294.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

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it was black, the other, white. It turned out one half of his shield was black, the other white.

The Bible makes it clear—and this is abundantly supported by Ellen G. White—that Christians not only rejoice in God’s forgiveness for past sins, but also rejoice in the promise of power to live His new life. Living the Christian life acceptable to God is as impossible for Christians on their own as is erasing the records of their sins from the books of heaven. Both are possible only by the grace of God.

“Be holy, for I am holy,” “pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (1 Peter 1:16; Heb 12:14), are not forensic statements. Whatever definition Christians may have of holiness, it must do with life and living. It is experiential. And to be compatible with Scripture, it must surely include a rectitude of character beyond the scope of man on his own. In the words of Ellen White,

The holiness that God’s word declares [man] must have before he can be saved is the result of the working of divine grace as he bows in submission to the discipline and restraining influence of the Spirit of truth.⁴⁶

Holiness is the gift of God through Christ [just as acquittal is the gift of God through Christ] [Those who are born again] become conformed to His likeness, changed by His Spirit from glory to glory. From cherishing supreme love for self, they come to cherish supreme love for God and for Christ . . .⁴⁷

Our own strength is weakness, but that which God gives is mighty and will make everyone who obtains it more than conquerors.⁴⁸

And here is abundant cause for greater, fresh, praise to our God. For not only does He forgive, justify, which from the human perspective, at least, might seem the simpler act, but He takes hostile, rebellious, selfish, willful, unlovely, often hateful human beings—“and such were some of you”—and, transforming them, polishes them to reflect His own likeness. So I marvel at justification. I can marvel no less at sanctification.

This change in attitude and lifestyle is as fully the work of God as is forgiveness and acquittal. As one is dependent on Him for forgiveness,

⁴⁶ White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 203.

⁴⁷ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 6:1117.

⁴⁸ White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:203.

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so is one as fully dependent on Him for overcoming. As one is impossible without the immediate intervention of God, so is the other. All is of grace. And both the forensic acquittal and the empowerment for overcoming, says Ellen White, come through justification.

It is necessary now to clarify the concept of the subjective elements of imputed righteousness, as referred to by Ellen White. At the beginning of this article we played up the notion of a subjective aspect in justification, as though it were strictly Roman Catholic, with no Protestant support. But while both Ellen White and Roman Catholicism—as well as many Protestant theologians—maintain that justification has its experiential as well as legal aspects, this is far from implying they and Catholics are saying the same thing. In fact about the only similarity is that both teach that imputed righteousness is more than a legal transaction. So what is the difference between what we have sketched of Ellen White’s view of justification and the Roman Catholic position? We note a few differences pertinent to our discussion.

1. In Ellen White’s, Adventist, and Protestant teaching, justification never means what Buchanan⁴⁹ called the Catholic divine’s “favorite doctrine,” that it becomes inherent, in the sense that when received it is then intrinsic, infused, and so is the Christian’s own. *Justification is a gift of grace*, whether we mean justification in the sense we have seen Ellen White sometimes refer to it, which we term subjective, or whether we mean the justification we call legal or objective. It is always, continuously, and completely only of God. Justification through faith, in any context, can be the Christian’s only in the way that the light bulb can continue to be illuminated—as long as the electrical flow continues. So Christians maintain their justification and continue in the sanctification process only as the Holy Spirit is continuously in their lives. It does not, in the words of the Council of Trent, “adhere to [the soul] as the soul’s own holiness.”⁵⁰ Ellen White explicitly denies that it does. She writes, “[I]n order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.”⁵¹ It is ours only in the sense of “Christ within us, “ whether it be

⁴⁹ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Students’ Reformed Theological Library (Banner of Truth, n.d.), 148.

⁵⁰ “Justification: I. [*sic*] The Catholic Doctrine of Justification,” section 2, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Appleton, 1910); retrieved 1 February 2007, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

⁵¹ John Armstrong, gen. ed., *Roman Catholicism* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 203; emphasis in original.

what we call subjective or objective. For by subjective we understand that Christians must become “partakers of the divine nature;” it must be “Christ in you the hope of glory.”

2. In Roman Catholicism justification is by faith *and a holy life*⁵² through the sacrament, baptism—“Justification is conferred in baptism, the sacrament of faith.”⁵³ In Ellen White justification “comes alone through faith in Christ.”⁵⁴ She does not use the term, “faith alone.” This is understandable, and shows her theological precision, because those words are sometimes used without qualification, when, in actuality justification depends on repentance and confession (1 John 1:9), regeneration and renewal. “He saved us, . . . by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. . . so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life” (Titus 3: 5-7, RSV).

3. In Catholicism sanctification is part of justification. “Justification includes the remission of sins, *sanctification*, and the renewal of the inner man”⁵⁵ Ellen White defines them as complementary, but different and distinct in a statement we quoted previously: “The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.”

4. In Catholicism, sanctification being part of justification, justification “means both the event by which the Christian life is initiated and the *process* by which the believer is regenerated.”⁵⁶ And as a process it was described at the Council of Trent.⁵⁷ But biblically (Rom 5:1), and in the writing of Ellen White, justification is not a process but an immediate, punctiliar transaction. “The moment true faith in the merits of the costly atoning sacrifice is exercised, claiming Christ as a personal Saviour, that moment the sinner is justified before God because he is pardoned.”⁵⁸ In summary, we suggest that there are two aspects to justification: the legal, the declarative, and the subjective. This is confirmed not only by Ellen White, but by contemporary biblical scholarship. The subjective has perhaps been underemphasized in view of the strong Reformation emphasis on the legal. It is sometimes felt that to admit anything but the declara-

⁵² White, *Selected Messages*, 1:366.

⁵³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 536.

⁵⁴ White, *Signs of the Times*, August 22, 1892, 2:507.

⁵⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 544; emphasis supplied.

⁵⁶ *Roman Catholicism*, 203; emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 317.

⁵⁸ White, *Our High Calling* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1961), 52.

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tive in justification is to weaken it mortally. But the subjective does not weaken the objective any more than the law weakens grace when rightly understood. The forensic “alien righteousness” aspect of Luther’s justification maintains its place, which is to graciously, freely credit Christ’s merits to the account of the penitent sinner. Here is the heart of justification. The simultaneous subjective aspect of justification, which the Bible and Ellen White affirm, is God’s response of power to the sinner’s call to enable him to strive toward holiness of life. And, we repeat, the second as well as the first is beyond the range of the sinner himself.

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