

Episode 18

Mormon Identity

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

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NARRATOR: Welcome to Mormon Identity, a thirty minute talk radio program that addresses church topics important to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Our host is Robert L. Millet, professor of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

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ROBERT MILLET: We welcome you once again to Mormon Identity. I am Bob Millet, and I am joined today by my friend and colleague, Brent Top, who is the chair of the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. Welcome Brent.

BRENT TOP: Thank you, Bob.

ROBERT MILLET: Today we want to talk about a dimension of the gospel that has much to do with the way we live, the way we are, how we act, when we know we are clean and right with God. We are going to talk about the principles of justification and sanctification, both what they mean doctrinally, theologically, and what they mean practically. Maybe I can begin, Brent, with just reading a very brief statement from Elder D. Todd Christofferson, now a member of the Council of the Twelve. Elder Christofferson wrote, “Justification and sanctification are the fruit of the atonement’s infinite virtue, which virtue we also refer to as mercy or grace.” We are going to talk today about, in this segment, about what it means to be justified, how that comes, and then what it means to be sanctified. Brent, it seems to me that this is all about the question of a person being right with God, a person being in a right standing with God. When you have students who want to know how they stand with God, how do we counsel young people? How do we counsel ourselves in knowing whether we are right with God?

BRENT TOP: Well, I think that is a very, very relevant and important issue because often times we tend to feel that we are not right with God when we are right with God.

ROBERT MILLET: Why would that happen in your mind?

BRENT TOP: I think because we tend to equate that phrase “right with God” with perfect, meaning we have never made a mistake or we live everything absolutely perfectly and right. And

that, I don't believe is what the Lord is saying when he is saying you are right with me, that it doesn't mean that you never have made a mistake or that you will ever make a mistake but that you are striving to live in accordance with God's principles, and so that you are not only trying to be right, make right, but do right with God. So you are not perfect, but I feel that I am striving to do what the Lord has asked me to do, and I think that is what it means to be right with God. Alma asked the question, we talked about it in one of our sessions, the question, you know, "Have you been born of God?" I think he asked the question succinctly is if you were to be called upon to die at this moment, what would your standing be before the Lord, and could I look up with a clear conscience? Not meaning have I ever done bad, but...

ROBERT MILLET: Yeah, it is not that I have lived this sin free life.

BRENT TOP: Yes, it is, am I at peace with the life that I am trying to live and the direction that I am heading?

ROBERT MILLET: When the prophet Joseph Smith tried to teach in the "Lectures on Faith" that final ingredient, that final prerequisite for faith is an actual knowledge that the course in life that we are pursuing is according to the will of God. I do not think he had in mind a sin free life, but I think he had in mind the idea that I know, I sense that the direction I am headed is the general direction the Lord wants me to go in. I am thinking, for example, when you mention the word "perfect", which is not a bad correlate here. When it says that Job was perfect before the Lord, or that Noah was perfect in his generation. I do not think we mean perfect life is a sin free life, but it is a whole life, a complete life, a fully formed life, a mature life, in the sense that we are going in the right direction. I remember reading a book some years ago by a Christian writer who said, "If, in fact, sin is missing the mark, then what is righteousness?" Then she said, and I love this, "Target practice." Meaning, If we are missing that bull's eye in shooting, if we are not quite hitting it, the Lord is in many ways more concerned with the direction we are aiming and where we are aiming than He is with our hitting the bull's eye each time and that a life of righteousness is a life of practicing to hit that bull's eye.

BRENT TOP: Well, and I think that that is with justified or being right with God. Elder McConkie gave a wonderful talk at the funeral of Elder S. Dilworth Young, and he talked about how when we leave this life, this mortal existence, the direction we are heading, we are not going to veer from that into the next life, and so the direction we are heading, if we are going in the right direction, that is, we are going to hit the target. That is we are not all of the sudden going to have the rug pulled out from under us and say, "Nope, nope you did not do enough." If you are moving in the right direction in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and trusting in Him who did live the perfect law, then we are right with God.

ROBERT MILLET: Yes, as I recall, his language in that sermon and Elder Young's funeral was; if we die in the faith that is the same thing as saying that our calling and our election have been made sure. That is pretty strong language.

BRENT TOP: That is very, very strong.

ROBERT MILLET: Brent, what are some options? What are some ways that a person could, hypothetically, be right with God.

BRENT TOP: Well, the most obvious, and I am not good at it at all, is to do everything right.

ROBERT MILLET: Well, should I talk about that one? [LAUGHING]

BRENT TOP: I guess you are the one that is the expert on that, [JOKING] but, and I think that is exactly what the apostle Paul is reminding us. That none of us can do right all the time, and so the way that we really get right with God is to be made right with God through the atonement of Jesus Christ. So I accept Christ as my Savior. I strive to live His gospel and do what I can, but He makes me right because I cannot make myself right with God no matter how hard I try.

ROBERT MILLET: Alright, this whole idea then of being made right, I am reminded of this passage from Second Nephi chapter two, Lehi to Jacob, "and men (verse 5) are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil, (that is through the light of Christ) and the law is given unto men." Of course, it means the law of Moses, but it means any law. "And by the law no flesh is justified." Language very similar to Paul, by the law no flesh is justified. So, if a person, hypothetically, could live the law of God perfectly without sin, without deviation, without detour, it could be said that, that person had been justified by law or by works. But of course, as we are told here by Paul, that is a nice hypothetical situation. But the only person to travel that path was the Lord Jesus himself. We will be right back.

ROBERT MILLET: Welcome back to Mormon Identity. This is Bob Millet, and I am joined by my friend and colleague Brent Top. Both of us are from Religious Education at Brigham Young University. Brent, we are talking about justification and sanctification. We began talking about justification. When you think, Brent, of a just man or a just woman, what does that connote to you?

BRENT TOP: Well, we see that in the scriptures a lot, but I think it really means a good man, a righteous man, a holy man, but I think it really has a meaning of something a little bit different because when we think of good and righteous and holy, we tend to think of it as, I have achieved that in some way. And I don't think that is what justified is really trying to say to us, just as we talked in the last segment, that we do not become right with God just by total and complete obedience to the law. It is that Christ makes it possible for us

to be right with God and the same thing with just. In Doctrine and Covenants section 76 in the vision of the celestial kingdom, I really like the way the Lord, through the Prophet Joseph uses the term just with regards to the celestial. It says these are “just men made perfect.”

ROBERT MILLET: And goes on to say through the atonement....

BRENT TOP: Atonement of Jesus Christ, and so justified is someone who has been made guiltless or has been pardoned through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

ROBERT MILLET: The words I think of, you know when you think of justify, what does it mean to justify a margin if you are typing or on the computer? You line things up. To justify is to put them in line. A man or a woman who has been justified is a person who is in line with God. I think of words like, oh, I’m innocent, I’m exonerated, I’m forgiven, I’m free from sin.

BRENT TOP: You know, I like those terms. The one word I don’t, I’m not sure that it fits as well theologically is innocent. We think of little children as being innocent, but I like the idea of us being exonerated or pardoned. Pardoned, I think is a better word because we have sinned.

ROBERT MILLET: Yeah, we weren’t innocent, but we are made innocent.

BRENT TOP: Like little children. They are unaccountable. You and I are accountable, and so I have sinned. “I have fallen short of the glory of God,” as the apostle Paul says. “I have, by virtue of the fall and my own carnal, sensual, devilish nature, I don’t have any claim upon God’s goodness or righteousness unless Christ forgives me and pardons me and then makes me just or justified.”

ROBERT MILLET: Well that is that language of Alma chapter 22, where it says, “Since man had fallen, he could not merit anything of himself.”

BRENT TOP: Right.

ROBERT MILLET: Now, so when I, so when we think of a just man, we are talking about a person that is made, or a just woman, a person that is made right with God through the atonement.

BRENT TOP: And we might interject at that point to say through the atonement, meaning through the first principles and ordinance of the gospel, which is the atonement. So, it isn’t that I can passively sit by and just expect God to make be right. I do need to exercise faith. I do repent of my sins. I do partake of the ordinances. I do live my life so that the Holy Ghost can come in and be my companion. Then I am pardoned.

ROBERT MILLET: And that pardon, Brent, as I understand the concept of justify is a pronouncement, as it were, that represents kind of a legal status for me. God essentially changes my standing before him and before law and before all people. A person who has received the gospel, a person who has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, who has that faith, who then repents, who is baptized, receives the Holy Ghost, such a person has his sins remitted and made right with God, justified, and again, that has to do with one's standing. I am thinking of a couple of analogies. How about an accused man in a court of law? He is neither innocent nor guilty, but he is accused.

BRENT TOP: Uh huh.

ROBERT MILLET: Now, he will either be set free, based on what the jury comes up with, or he will go to prison. So, once that verdict is rendered, his standing changes. So, once they say not guilty, he is no longer the accused. Nothing inside of him changed, but what changes was his status, his standing before the law. He became innocent.

BRENT TOP: Yes, I think we could even go one step further. We see it all the time. The President of the United States, and I would imagine sovereign leaders in other parts of the world as well have the right to pardon criminals.

ROBERT MILLET: It isn't that they didn't do wrong.

BRENT TOP: That is exactly right. It never says that they were sinless or that they didn't commit the crime, but they are no longer subject to the demands of justice that would impose a penalty upon them. Another way of saying it is the record is expunged. So, I did the crime. I did my time, I guess you would say, and so now I am clean. I am now.

ROBERT MILLET: At least before the law you are.

BRENT TOP: That's right. According to the law, there is no penalty that will be imposed upon me.

ROBERT MILLET: In the June 2001 *Ensign* article by Elder D. Todd Christofferson called "Justification and Sanctification", Elder Christofferson writes this, "He, the Lord, removes our condemnation without removing the law. We are pardoned and placed in a condition of righteousness with Him. We become like Him without sin. We are sustained and protected by the law by justice. We are in a word, justified. We will be right back.

ROBERT MILLET: Welcome back to Mormon Identity. This is Bob Millet. I am joined by Brent Top, and we are discussing the matters of justification and sanctification, scriptural concepts that describe both our standing and our state before God. You know, Brent, I was thinking of another analogy. We mentioned the analogy of a person being the accused moving to innocent or guilty. And nothing inside of them changed, but their status, their standing changed, and I thought of another one. A young couple that is about to be married. They

come together and the moment that justice of the peace, or that bishop, or that temple worker pronounces them man and wife, nothing inside of them changed, but their standing changed, and it is just not the same. They are no longer single. They are no longer preparing to be married. They are no longer fiancés. They are now spouses. And so, that is, I think, a pretty good analogy of the idea of they did not undergo an inner transformation because of that, but they did change their status and their standing before the law.

BRENT TOP: You know, and I think that is a good analogy. My experience has been that if we were to ask members of the Church in a gospel doctrine class and say, “Have you ever been justified, or have you experienced justification?” Many, if not most, would think, “Oh no that is beyond me.” But if I were to stop and say, “Have you ever been forgiven of your sins?” Most of them would say yes and that is exactly what justification is. You have been pardoned. You have been forgiven of your sins. I like to use an analogy with my students of with they can all relate to of buying a car, and I tell a story of my daughter when she was a teenager needing a car. So we went and bought an old beater car, and she could not pay for it, and so I was stuck with being a co-signer on the loan. So, I recognized that there was no way in the world that she could totally and completely pay this off, and since my credit was kind of on the line, I then saw that she was doing the very best she could, and so I paid off the loan and said “Janie, that old beater car is now yours.” And, so the law has been satisfied through our mediator, through Christ. So I am justified because now the slate has been washed clean. That payment or penalty is taken away, and now my state has been changed. So now Janie now has a car. It was her car before, but now the payments have changed.

ROBERT MILLET: That is good. Good analogy. This is an analogy that I loved. Brother Sydney Sperry, one of the great gospel minds, who passed away back in the ‘70s. Brother Sperry talks in his book, *Paul’s Life and Letters* about this concept that meant so much to the apostle Paul of being justified. Brent, I was going to say we have not made the point, so let’s make it here. We mentioned the hypothetical, if a person could not keep the law perfectly it would be said of them they had been justified by law or by works. That means the only possible way of doing it is to be justified by trusting in someone who did keep the law perfectly, Jesus Christ,

BRENT TOP: That’s right.

ROBERT MILLET: And that is called justification by faith, and that is what we are talking about here, trust, reliance, a complete confidence in Jesus Christ. Brother Sperry gives this analogy. He says “A comparison may be made by reference to a man on an escalator. We anticipate that he will reach a given floor if he stays on the escalator. So a person will eventually be justified but may be regarded as being so now if he retains a remission of sins and

continually shows his faith in God. In other words, if the top of the escalator is where I need to be spiritually, and I am at the bottom now of the escalator, it's as if the Lord treats me as if I am at the top. Why? Because he knows if I will just stay on the escalator, eventually I am going to arrive at the top." So that is that concept of enduring or staying faithful so that he can treat me that way. It reminded me of this wonderful passage in the Book of Mormon when the Savior is among the Nephites. This is Third Nephi chapter 27 in verse 16. "And it shall come to pass (Jesus said) that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled." And notice this, "And if he endureth to the end," if he stays on that escalator, "behold, him will I hold guiltless before my father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world." What do you make of that Brent?

BRENT TOP: Well I like the idea I will hold as guiltless, and we put that with Doctrine and Covenants section 58, where the Lord says "I will remember them no more."

ROBERT MILLET: It isn't that they did not happen.

BRENT TOP: That is right, and I think cognitively Heavenly Father, who is omniscient, I don't think all of the sudden he has memory loss, it is it doesn't matter anymore. You are absolved of that. I am not bringing it up. You are forgiven of your sins.

ROBERT MILLET: Let's turn our attention then, Brent, to the second portion of this. What it means to be sanctified. When you hear the word sanctified what do you think of Brent?

BRENT TOP: Well, I think the root there, the *sanctus*, the *sanct* is to be made holy. One is to be made clean, and the other justified and to be made holy means to be transformed to be changed. As you mentioned, one is a change of standing.

ROBERT MILLET: And state

BRENT TOP: And the state

ROBERT MILLET: Oh, excuse me, standing

BRENT TOP: Our whole being before the Lord, and so we are going to be made holy. We are going to be turned into new creatures in Christ, not just absolved. Elder Bruce Hafen made a very interesting distinction in a wonderful talk and then an article in the *Ensign* called "Beauty for Ashes."

ROBERT MILLET: Later appeared in his book *The Broken Heart*.

BRENT TOP: Exactly. Elder Hafen used the analogy of someone that's in prison who satisfies the demands of justice and satisfies his debt to society, that would be justified. He is now

made guiltless at that point. He is then put out of the prison, but it is not necessarily that he has had any rehabilitation or change. Sanctification is not only building upon justifying, satisfying the debt to justice, but that we are remolded and reshaped in the image of Christ.

ROBERT MILLET: I have heard it described this way, Brent. That when we are justified, we change our standing before God and we are absolved of the penalty of sin, while when we are sanctified by the spirit and through the powers of the atonement we change our state, our inner state and, in this case, we are absolved or we are rid of the effects of sin, or as someone has said, the tyranny of sin.

BRENT TOP: You know there is another word you could use there that King Benjamin uses, and we also see it in example of those that were sanctified in the Book of Mormon. They lose their desire for sin. One, they lose their sins, the other is they lose their desire for sins and sinfulness.

ROBERT MILLET: You know this whole idea of being right before God, being justified, made innocent, in the sense of made to be in a pardoned condition, as you said and now to in a gradual way, over time have the Holy Ghost begin that process of changing and renewing, I think it would be worthwhile for us to read a few scriptures. Brent, why don't you read for us Alma 13:11-12. And this is Alma reflecting on the past, for him the former day Saints. Notice, let's notice here what is said about being sanctified.

BRENT TOP: "Therefore, they were called after this holy order and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb. Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having had their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence, and there were many exceedingly great many who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God."

ROBERT MILLET: Do you want to comment on that?

BRENT TOP: I just think that made pure, they were sanctified, their desires were changed. I like to, again, building upon the little analogy I share with my students about the car. Justified is paying off the loan on the car, but I still have an old beater up car. Sanctified would be the Lord, our creditor, would say to us, "Now you get a new car." A totally new car that is paid for by the Savior.

ROBERT MILLET: That is good. That is really good. So, again if we are justified, we're made right with God. As we are sanctified, the Holy Spirit working within us over a lifetime begins to... I remember Elder Orson Pratt said, "We begin to love the things which we before hated and hate the things we before loved." So we find ourselves more enticed by

righteousness and turned off, as it were, by wickedness. Here is one of my favorite passages. This is Helaman chapter 3, verse 35. “Nevertheless, they (that is the more humble part of the people) did fast and pray oft and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ unto the filling of their souls with joy and consolation. Yea even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts.” And then this very helpful phrase: “Which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.” What does that say to you?

BRENT TOP: Well, I like that word “yield”, turn over, I am turning over to. When we yield in an automobile, when we are yielding to traffic, we are giving them the right of way. We are giving Christ the right of way in our lives because He is the right way, I am more than happy to yield to His ways and seek to give Him that full right in my life to change me, to transform me, and if I just trust in Him and follow that path, then He will let me become sanctified and ultimately like Him.

ROBERT MILLET: So, again, in thinking back, justify, pardoned, sanctify, cleansed, purified, made holy through the powers of the Spirit. The ancients, that happened to them. It happened to those who yielded their hearts. I am thinking, Brent, too, of the 88th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, those wonderful verses 67 and 68. “And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole body shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you, and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things.” And in this next verse, verse 68, “Therefore sanctify yourselves.” And I know that there are people who have kind of reacted when they have been told, now let’s sanctify ourselves. We say wait, wait, wait. Only God can sanctify us. Well, that is true. But the word not only means make holy. It also means separate, set yourself apart. There is a sense in which we can sanctify ourselves, in the sense that we separate ourselves from righteousness. We pull ourselves away from ill will. We pull ourselves away from sinfulness, we pull our way free of worldliness.

BRENT TOP: I saw a definition in the context of Nazarites of the Old Testament, who were consecrated and set apart, but I love the phrase that goes right along with sanctifying ourselves. The definition was that someone that is set apart or sanctified is sacredly aloof from all unrighteousness.

ROBERT MILLET: Wow. That is excellent, sacredly aloof. And so, again, to be sanctified is to be made holy, to be made pure, to be set apart, to be separated. So when we are sanctified, it affects our state, our inner state. It rids us of the effects of sin and the tyranny of sin. Maybe we can close, Brent, by reading these concluding verses from section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In conclusion, that is, verse 30. “And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true.” This is the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Lord giving us an insight into the fact that the things

we have been talking about are very true. “And we know also that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength.” The Lord has provided means through his atonement, through the ordinances of the gospel, through our own noble and faithful discipleship, by which our hearts may be made clean, we may be pardoned, and over time sanctified and made ready to dwell with God, angels and holy beings.

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NARRATOR: You have been listening to Mormon Identity. Thank you for tuning in. We hope you join us next time.

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