

Faith Alone

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[0 : 00] Well now, today we come to this astonishing statement from the Reformation that we are saved by faith alone.

We are justified by faith alone. Faith, this whole idea of believing in faith is very popular today. We hear it all the time.

You've just got to have faith. And the idea is, it means you're a positive, upbeat, optimistic person who's nice to be around.

Ah, that's a person with faith. They're a believer. Well, 500 years ago, the Roman Catholic Church taught that faith was just a scent of the mind, mental agreement with the teachings of the church, believing the truths that the church taught.

Therefore, you see, you needed to add to that good works and participation in the sacraments. The Bible includes our mental assent in faith.

[1 : 04] But the problem is that even the devil believes in that kind of sense. He mentally assents to everything that's in the Bible. The great discovery of the Reformation is that faith is also trust, commitment, and embracing the person of Jesus.

And you don't embrace Jesus by doing things, by works. You embrace Jesus by faith alone. And it changes the whole landscape of Christianity.

Because faith is no longer in the church as an institution or in the rituals of the church. But it's in Jesus Christ alone. And that's quite dangerous and liberating.

For example, the understanding of what we do in Holy Communion changes. The Lord's Supper used to be seen as a kind of infusion of grace into us.

But the reformers said, no, no, it's a reenactment of the gospel word, which is why Archbishop Cramner, the Anglican reformer, changed the name from the sacrifice or sacrament of the Eucharist to Holy Communion with God.

[2 : 16] Our context is different today. I think we use faith in primarily two ways today. The first way is we think it's a vice, a personal vice. You know, for those people who are a bit soft in the head, who believe things that they just cannot prove.

This is a view that faith is like superstition. It's a blind faith, a leap in the dark. So you hear some university students say, I had to put my faith aside so that I could study some serious science.

The opposite hand, we also believe today that faith is like a personal virtue. It's a personal ability that some people just seem to be born with and others of us have to work at hard to achieve.

So we're told, believe in yourself or just believe. Those of you who are old enough to remember the Olympic Games here in Vancouver, the Olympic anthem was, I believe. Just believe.

This is the most popular view of faith today. It's faith in faith. It really doesn't matter what you believe in, so long as you believe. It's like a quasi-magical power that makes you feel better.

[3 : 27] It's a personal virtue. And there is, of course, a Christian version of this. By the way, I have a friend who's into corny sayings, and he put a sign up outside his church when he was preaching on faith.

It was, come and get a faith lift. The Christian version of this personal virtue is that if I have enough faith, I can make things happen.

I can see miracles if I have enough faith. I can even get myself saved. Now, neither personal vice or personal virtue is the Bible view of faith for two very good reasons.

And one is the grace of God, and the second is the death of Jesus Christ. So what I'm going to do for the remainder of my short time is to look at the grace of God and the death of Christ, and then I want to talk about what true Christian faith is, and I've got three headings there.

So let me quickly deal with this. The grace of God, firstly. Firstly, you see, if faith is my personal ability, it's my personal virtue, what that means is Christianity is a performance religion where I do my bit and God does his bit, and that empties out grace of any radical power.

[4 : 44] If you think about it, in most areas of our life, we do justify ourselves by performance, our achievements. If you're an athlete, if you own a business, if you're a teacher, if you're a student, your identity and status is based on your performance.

And it seems so natural for us that the same would apply to our relation to God. He should reward my performance. But if you have a look down in Romans 3, verse 23, I want to read a couple of verses here.

Verse 23 starts, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift.

And then down halfway through verse 25, To be received by faith. Justified is God's verdict on the last day.

It's God's statement on our whole lives. And the Bible says that we are not justified by anything we do, but by grace as a gift, as we receive his Son by faith.

[5 : 51] See, I think today we want God to be big in love and small in righteous judgment. But the measure of his grace is exactly the measure of his righteousness. Grace is not God helping those who help themselves.

Grace is God helping those who hate him and are hostile to him. And when it says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, it's not just talking about the naughty things we've done. It's saying that deep in our hearts, our dreams and our desires are deeply hostile to God. And therefore, we're not able to do anything toward our salvation. As one archbishop said, The only thing we contribute to our salvation is the sins from which we need to be forgiven.

That's why faith cannot be a personal ability. It's a receiving instrument. We receive the gift of God. The second reason it's not a personal ability is because of the death of Jesus Christ.

See, I find it difficult preaching on faith in one sense, because real faith has no interest in itself. It points away from itself to something else. This is so obvious, so simple, it's hard for us.

[6 : 59] I mean, let me use a really simple and obvious illustration. You all are sitting on seats, right? It means you're exercising a simple form of faith in those seats.

You came in this morning, you believed in your mind that the seats, the chair would hold you up. You sat down, you acted on it, and they're holding you up. Now, it is completely irrelevant how strong or how weak your faith in the seat is.

What matters is whether the chair is going to hold you up or not, right? Do you understand? It's really simple. We're doing this all the time. Because the power of faith is only as strong as the object that we believe in.

And this is the center of the Bible. If you look down again at chapter 3, verse 24. We are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

There it is. It brings together God's justifying our believing and the death of Jesus Christ. We don't redeem ourselves. Jesus redeems us. Jesus' blood bears away our wrath.

[8 : 18] We can hear the verdict of the last day now. The remission of sins and the righteousness we so desperately need, we receive by faith in him. Our faith is in him and what he did.

So now, here's the point we've all been looking forward to. What then really is Christian faith? And I've got three headings. And they all begin with E.

Because every good sermon should have alliteration. What is true Christian faith? The first is, it is embrace. Christian faith is embracing the person of Jesus Christ as our Savior.

We embrace him and his word because Jesus is not an object like a chair. He's a person, a living, risen Savior who revealed himself to us.

And faith is responding to him. It's dealing personally with him. It's trusting him to do what he promised. It really is that simple. It's embracing Jesus.

[9 : 21] And the New Testament floods us with pictures of this embrace. It calls faith coming to Christ, receiving Christ. It calls faith taking refuge in Christ, laying hold of Christ.

It talks about faith as eating and drinking Christ, committing ourselves to Christ and looking to Christ. It is the active response of receiving his performance and embracing him.

Faith embraces Jesus. That's the first thing. Secondly, it is entry into Jesus. Later on in Romans, the Apostle Paul says, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the idea is that we become spiritually one with Jesus, like a branch grafted into a vine. By faith, we are made members of his body, like my fingers and hand and my arm are members of my body. And now our whole lives are lived in Jesus Christ. It's entry into Jesus Christ. Let me give you a quote from John Calvin, one of the reformers.

[10:27] We do not contemplate. We do not think of Jesus outside ourselves from far away so that his righteousness will be imputed to us from over there. But because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body because he deigns to make us one with him.

Well, how about Luther? He says, by faith, you are cemented to Christ so that he and you are as one person which cannot be separated and is attached to him forever.

And you now declare, I am as Christ. And Christ now declares, I am as that sinner who is attached to me and I to him.

For by faith, we are joined together into one flesh and one bone. Luther says later, faith couples Christ and me more intimately than a husband is coupled with his wife.

When we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we enter into Jesus Christ. We become one with him. And putting on Jesus means when God looks at me, he sees Jesus instead of me.

[11:40] Despite my bad heart, despite my bad record, despite my ongoing sin, Jesus has covered me. I'm sorry, God has covered me with his sons.

My sins are taken away. I have his righteousness. So you see, the issue for Christian faith is not how strong your faith is. It's how strong Jesus is.

It's not how righteous you've been this week. It's how righteous Jesus is. It's not, have you prayed enough? Have you sinned too much? Is your faith in the, you know, working?

It is Christ real. And that is why we're justified by faith alone. You ever ask the question, why did God say you can be justified by love or by prayer?

And I think the simple answer is, if we were justified by love or by prayer, we would have something to boast about. But if we're justified by faith, by receiving and entering into Christ, we have nothing to boast about.

[12:41] So faith is embrace and its entry. And thirdly, I want to talk about faith is an exercise. We exercise our faith. In just a moment, please.

Boys and girls, three minutes and then we'll finish. And we'd like to see some of those things that you've done. So, the exercise of faith.

Listen carefully, please. Faith is a gift from God. But God does not do our believing for us. We are justified by faith alone.

But if it's living faith, it'll never be alone. It cannot lie dormant. Otherwise, it's not true faith. It always bears fruit in good works.

Because the immediate effect of embracing Jesus is wanting to please him. It's seeing our troubles as God's discipline. It's seeking to serve others. It's taking up the battle against temptation.

[13:42] I quote Luther again. He says, when it comes to faith, what a living, active, powerful thing it is. It cannot do otherwise. It cannot do other than good at all times.

It never waits to be asked whether there's some good work for it to do. Rather, before the question is raised, it's done the deed and keeps on doing it. Now, this is exactly what we believe as Anglicans.

And if you would just take out the wine-coloured prayer book for a moment and turn to page 702. These are the 39 articles, which you should all know by heart.

This is our domestic creed as Anglicans, these 39 articles. And Article 11 of the justification of man, and that means woman as well, says this. We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, by faith and not for our own works or deservings.

Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, or faith alone, is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort, as are more largely expressed in the homily on justification.

[15:09] There's so much comfort and joy in this true faith because of Jesus, because we rest on him and not ourselves. This is life and death for us, brothers and sisters, and I do hope you all know what I'm talking about.

Whether we trust Christ or whether we trust ourselves. Christ alone is the source of righteousness and wisdom and blessing. So embrace him and enter into him and exercise your faith in him today.

Now let's see what the children have done, shall we? Thank you. Thank you. Shoulders too. Pleasure. He wrote a character of the children. He wrote a character of the people the father, who are■■■ and their sins of which he is. Here's a character of his father, so we have to give you a Mary's father. He wrote a character of the children of women's. He wrote a character of the children. He wrote a character of our children. His husband from this mastermind. So the man that he practiced for him and his sons and daughters were Robin Davy,