

Faith Alone

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[0 : 00] And we'll look at some of the verses around that relating to what's in verse 28. Romans chapter 3 verse 28, For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

We're following through with studies of the solas of the Reformation, as they're usually called, these great doctrines where we find, as we began with Scripture, Scripture alone.

And then we looked at grace alone. We're saved by grace alone. And now we're coming to faith alone, faith in Christ particularly, faith alone through which we come to be justified.

Let's take a little travel to a jail in Philippi, first of all. Described in the book of Acts for us, where Paul and Silas have been thrown into the innermost part of that jail, into these miserable conditions. There's an earthquake just happened, and the jail has been shaken, so that the chains holding the prisoners have been broken, and they're able to be free.

[1 : 20] And the jailer, who is terrified, jumps in in front of Paul and Silas, having heard them throughout the night singing praises to God, to their God.

This pagan man, this rough Roman jailer, comes and throws himself before them, and asks this great question, What must I do to be saved? And Paul's response and answer is, Trust or believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.

And as you open up that word saved in the teaching of the Bible, as the Bible opens up the meaning of that word saved, the whole scope and breadth of that word saved, you can then see that it includes our being set right with God, and we're being set into a right relationship with God, apart from or away from the relationship we have with Him naturally, which is one in which we are held in our sins, and because of our sins, justly condemned.

What we're looking at today is really that whole issue of coming to be set right with God, or being justified, which is normally how the Bible refers to it.

And we'll see that being justified is something that very much involves faith on our part, and an act on God's part, where indeed we are set before Him as righteous.

[2 : 56] Instead of being accounted guilty and therefore condemned in our justification, which we come to receive by faith, we are accounted righteous by God, and therefore in a right relationship with Him from then on.

Now that's the burden of Romans, these opening chapters, similar to what we saw in respect to grace in Ephesians, where you find in chapter 2, the first few verses of it really deal very much with our sin, our sinfulness, with those things that are so dark and so difficult to accept, and yet so important.

You cannot understand grace, except as you see it against the dark background of our sin and what we deserve. In the same way, Romans really is talking here all the way through from the beginning about righteousness.

You see how often righteousness, the word righteousness, and its opposite unrighteous, is actually used throughout these first few chapters of Romans. And what Paul is burdened for is to demonstrate that being accounted righteous by God does not come about through any works on our part by which we might earn it.

We cannot earn righteousness. We are disqualified because of our sin and the inability that is attached to it. And as you read through these first three chapters of Romans, which leads into this whole emphasis on being justified by faith alone, you come to the likes of verse 23 here, which in many ways really is a summary of all that he said in the previous chapters.

[4 : 40] For all sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

Now there really you have a summary both of what we are before we were justified, we all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And then it leads into the fact that we are justified by his grace as we saw last time, the undeserved favor of God, but this time it is through this faith by which we receive the righteousness that is in Christ Jesus.

And then you come to verse 26, that it was in order to show his righteousness that God actually did this, to show that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In other words, the way that God justifies and counts as righteous is not at the expense of his own righteousness or justice, it has to be in a way that maintains and keeps the justice, the righteousness of God himself.

[6 : 01] And that's the wonder of what God has done in Jesus Christ, that we come to be justified through faith in Christ in a way that accords with God's own righteousness, just as the death of Jesus is indeed the means that God has chosen and set up, as verse 23, 24 puts it, 25, God put him forward as a propitiation by his blood.

So there are three things really today that we want to look at, and then we'll finish with a following fourth point as a summary. First of all, what justification means.

This is talking about being justified by faith alone, faith in Christ. But what is justification? What does justification include? What is it about?

Because there's not much point really in looking at faith till you first of all look at justification and what being justified means, which we come to have by faith or through faith.

Well, justification is a judicial act of God. And that's an important aspect of the definition.

Justification or being justified is not something that God does within us.

[7 : 18] It's not like sanctification or being made holy or any other aspect of God's work that takes place within our souls. Justification is something that happens outside of ourselves, but involving us.

It's a judicial act. It's a legal declaration, you might say, by God of our status. It's to do with status, not an inward state.

And that's a very important distinction. Let me just try and put it this way. If you think of God as a judge, which really is what he is in these early chapters, and I know that's not popular today, but that's what the Bible teaches us.

God is a judge. God has judgment as part of his prerogative. And the way God is a judge, you might think of him as having his books of judgment before him, in which every single human life is recorded.

And as God looks upon the pages of his book of judgment, he finds your name, and he finds my name there. And when you go to verse 23, what you have there to begin with, all sinned and come short, fall short of the glory of God, well, against your name and against my name, in the judgment book of God, as he sits in judgment, he looks at that page with your name and my name on it, and he writes at the bottom of it, guilty.

[8 : 48] Guilty by virtue that we have sinned against him. There's no arguing with that. That's God's verdict. That's God's own judgment. That's God's declaration of you and I in our sinfulness, in our sinnership.

But then justification means God deals with that. And because of the death of Jesus, and the righteousness of Jesus through his death, God in justification wipes that page clean.

He wipes away the guilt. He wipes away the record where your guilt is recorded. That declaration is no longer valid when God justifies a sinner.

And instead of that guilt, God replaces it with the word righteous. righteous. It's not just that our sin is pardoned.

When we go into chapter 4, you can see there that it talks about being pardoned, especially as it mentions Abraham. And then it goes on to speak of David, Psalm 32, which we sang.

[10 : 01] And verses 7 to 8 there talks about the blessedness of those whose deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered, the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

In other words, God will not mark up on the record anymore his sin and therefore his guilt and condemnation because he's justified. Instead of that, God, having wiped away that record, is now replacing it with righteousness, with the righteousness of Jesus imputed to that person, put onto the record of that person, counted to that person as their very own righteousness.

So there's justification a declaration, a legal announcement, if you like, or act, or a judicial act of God. Something that God does in order to wipe away the record of guilt and replace it with a record of righteousness.

And it is important that you make a distinction between merely being forgiven our sin and being accounted righteous because you can be in a court of law and be found not guilty.

It doesn't mean you leave that court as a good person. It doesn't mean that you leave that court and the verdict of the judge includes that you are righteous as if you had never sinned.

[11:26] But that is what it is with God's righteousness imputed to us, with Christ's righteousness imputed to us, put onto our record, with guilt wiped away, and this in its place, God is saying, righteous.

In other words, it is as if we had never sinned. Because not only is our sin wiped clear and forgiven and covered from God's sight, it is actually now a record or a verdict of being righteous in His sight. Being as if we had never sinned. The larger catechism puts it this way. What is justification?

Justification. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight, not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ by God imputed to them and received by faith.

The Lord, we'll come to the receiving of it in a minute. That is what justification means. That's very briefly. But secondly, we need to look at what justification is based upon.

The catechism there, definition as well as this passage in Romans into chapter 4 as well, makes it very clear. Justification is based on Jesus Christ.

[12:54] Not on anything that God does in us, not on anything done by us, only for the sake of Christ alone. Look at verse 24 again.

We are justified freely by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation, that's a means of dealing with God's wrath against us, by His blood, that's to say, in the death of Jesus, to be received by faith.

God, you see, has set Him up as that propitiation, that means of diverting His wrath away from those who believe in Jesus, so that instead, as well as having this righteousness imputed to them, God sees them in Christ as no longer under His wrath, but having His undeserved favor are brought into friendship with Him.

And that's really where Jesus alone is important. We look at that probably the next solar, the next alone. It's through grace alone, by faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

That's really what it's saying to us. Our justification is based upon Jesus Christ and His death. His righteousness is alone the ground of our justification.

[14:19] Now that fits in with the number of places in the Bible where you find Jesus exclusively to the closing out of every other person or every other means as our Savior.

Acts chapter 4 verses 11 and 12, there is no other name given under heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved. Paul in Philippians 3, as he gave his own testimony there, you remember how he mentions in chapter 3 the things that he once boasted of, the things that he was once so concerned to lay all his trust upon, those acts of his own, those workings of his keeping of the law of God, the things which he says, I once counted as gain, the things I once saw as the ground of my acceptance with God, these I now count but rubbish, but worthless.

Why? So that I might be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own which is of the law, but the righteousness that is from God through faith.

That's what he's now looking to as he gives his testimony, saying the things I once saw as gain, I've now put them behind me, I think they're worthless because I have something far better, I have Jesus and his righteousness which I've come to have by faith imputed to my record.

So justification is a judicial act of God where the righteousness of Christ is put onto our record. It's grounded in, it's founded upon Jesus in his death and the righteousness of Christ especially in that.

[16:12] But then what's the relation of faith to justification? It's very clear in the passage here that we are justified because of what Christ has done, not by any works of our own and yet nevertheless we are justified by faith or through faith.

Faith is something that we exercise even though it comes to us through God's gift and worked by the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Now again we look at the catechism for this just to give us a definition and the larger catechism 72 what is justifying faith? The answer is a bit long but let's just go through it.

Justifying faith is a saving grace wrought or worked in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God. Now it's important you see that faith it's not something done outside of us it's something done in us by the Spirit of God by the grace of God this justifying faith the faith through which we come to be justified is indeed something that happens within us.

It's a product of the creative power of the Spirit of God. He works faith in our hearts in order to enable us to take the justification the righteousness that's outside of us in Christ into our possession.

[17 : 39] So the catechism goes on and says it's wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God whereby he being convinced of his sin and misery and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition not only assents to the truth of the gospel but receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness therein held forth for the pardon of sin and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

In other words we say faith is by the Spirit of God as it is wrought in our heart it becomes the means if you like by which we reach out and take the righteousness that's in Christ taking Christ and his righteousness into our possession.

therefore that becomes our property it becomes as if we had produced it ourselves except it is God who has done it for us.

But there are three elements to faith that are mentioned there in the way that the catechism gives us that definition. There's first of all knowledge bringing us knowledge of our sin misery and disability because faith contrary to what you might hear by secularistic or atheistic people who are against the Bible and against what you believe who will say to you that faith or the exercise of faith is really just launching out into something despite the fact that you don't know really much about it. It's a leap in the dark. Faith they'll say is just believing in something that you cannot know or in someone that you cannot see and therefore you cannot know properly and therefore you cannot verify.

[19 : 31] You know how it goes. Well this Bible tells us that's not what faith is at all. Faith is actually something that involves coming to know God and to know yourself and to know your sin and to know your disability through sin and to know the way in which God has provided for you against that disability in Jesus Christ and holds that out to you in the promise of the gospel.

Faith involves that knowledge of these things. You've come through the way in which God has revealed himself to us to know certain things that you need to know.

Faith far from being a leap in the dark a leap into the unknown you can see on the basis that God's word is the truth and that you see God's word scripture alone you remember our first study scripture alone as the basis of our information because it's the word of God it's true and it's reliable dependable and therefore when you believe in Christ you're not launching out into the unknown you're casting yourself onto the one that's known in the scriptures and through the scriptures as God and the savior it involves your knowledge it involves secondly your assent because as that catechism definition put it you accept you give assent to the truth of the promise of the gospel now that too is important that you assent to the truth of the promise of the gospel you say about this gospel this word of God you say

I believe that this is true I believe that this is the truth you assent to it you put your amen to it it's not just that you you have something there that you accept others take as God's word and as the truth of God faith assents to the truth of the promise of the gospel you say about that promise of the truth of the gospel the promise of salvation and Jesus Christ to all who believe you assent to that if you have this justifying faith you assent to that as the truth of God you take it as God's word you take it at face value you don't question it but then there's thirdly something else faith isn't just involving knowledge of the truth and an assent to the truth it involves what the catechism definition then said there said as receives and rests on Christ and his righteousness and you can describe that by one word and that is trust trust you trust in Christ the Jesus that you come to know through the gospel the Jesus that you come to assent to the truth of through the gospel is the

Jesus that you come to rest upon through faith because that's what faith essentially is not just a knowing of the truth and an assent to the truth it is a receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness not just on the truth as you find it in the bible you don't come to rest merely on the truth of the written word on the promise of the gospel you come ultimately to rest and this is so so

important you come to rest and receive and rest upon a person upon the person of Christ the person of Jesus because that's really what trust is coming to receive him and rest upon him lean your whole person your whole weight upon him in other words it's not just on God generally as a kind of general belief or a trust in God in a general sense justification by faith alone is faith in Christ resting upon Christ receiving

[23 : 46] Christ as your savior as your righteousness and that of course involves what you could call a willing surrender to Jesus and there may be some people here today who haven't yet done that I'm not bringing this out to be in any way critical or looking down on you or in any way belittling you but we're bringing this out so that you will and I will actually see to it that we have not stopped short of trusting in Jesus of putting ourselves and surrendering our whole persons our past and our present and our future into the hands of this person of this savior of this great savior Jesus Christ remember what Jesus said about what it meant to be his disciple if anyone will be my disciple let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me what an important definition that is because essentially that is really what you come to be or come to do by faith and faith really trusting in Jesus has that willing surrender that denying of yourself in order to give yourself to Jesus you don't any longer depend upon yourself you deny self-righteousness you deny yourself in terms of self-confidence self-achievement in order to have that status with

God you leave all that thing to do with self you leave it behind and you surrender yourself to Jesus and you say this is where my righteousness is this is where my acceptance with God is therefore that's where I lean that's where I trust that's where I lean upon that's who I lean upon that's where I come to lay to lay my trust it's interesting isn't it that Jesus said not only let him deny himself but take up his cross why did he add that what what does that add to the definition of being a disciple well why did Jesus take up his cross why did Jesus carry a cross made of wood towards that place where he was finally crucified even though it was taken off him before he reached the end of the journey but he carried the cross and carrying your cross meant going out to die you didn't carry a cross just for show and then go back home in those days if you carried a cross you were going to be crucified you were going to be put to death you were taking this cross because you knew that shortly you were going to die and in a spiritual way

Jesus turns that physical carrying of the cross into a spiritual truth a thing of spiritual importance where he says let him take up his cross if you're going to be my disciple you have to die to self you have to die to self discipleship isn't something that just covers the surface of your life and doesn't really get to your heart and soul to the root of the matter discipleship is a dying to yourself trusting in Jesus is turning away from yourself from everything that you can practice what Paul is saying here so repeatedly it's not by the works of the Lord it's not by our own achievement it's not by something that we try to earn from God it's by trusting in Christ and really in one sense it's a lot simpler isn't it and a lot less effort to trust in someone else to trust in Jesus than to try and manage by your own efforts it's such a lot of work trying to be self righteous and you can never do it anyway in God's sight what he requires of you and of me is to look to the

Jesus of the gospel and say that's what I need that's what I must make my own so I will trust in him and not in myself now you have knowledge today you have probably assent today in your own experience let me ask you do you have this trust you know the gospel you assent to the truth of the gospel have you surrendered your life to Jesus have you surrendered your self achievement to him have you surrendered your self righteousness to him have you surrendered everything to do with self have you placed that in his hand and said I can't Lord I can't achieve the status that I need in my relationship with you but

I don't need to because Jesus has done it for me and what you require of me is to accept that by faith and therefore be justified it's justification as a judicial act of God righteousness is imputed to us it's based on the righteousness of Christ the death of Christ being at the heart of that faith is connected with it in the way in which through faith in Christ this faith that involves knowledge of him and ourselves assent to the truth of the gospel and trusting in Christ resting on him receiving and resting on him that faith brings this righteousness into our possession or onto our account our God is pleased through our faith in Christ to mark up his righteousness against our record let me finish fourthly with asking a question does this really matter all that much why are we going back to the likes of justification by faith well it's not just to commemorate the reformation and 500 years since the reformation began that's important but what's important is the doctrine itself and the doctrine of justification amongst the others indeed the doctrine of justification probably more than any of the

rest why is it important why does it matter it matters firstly for

[30 : 51] Christ's glory because this doctrine of justification by faith in Christ faith alone in Christ it means that all the alternatives to that all alternative doctrines actually rob Christ of part of his glory if you like to put it that way it actually denigrate Christ it takes away from the glory of Christ as the one by whom and in whom we are justified that's why it's important that's why it matters because we are concerned with the glory of Christ the honor of Christ the reputation of Christ the position of Christ as appointed by God to be the savior of sinners secondly it matters because of the purity of the gospel for the purity of the gospel and that's important when Paul wrote to the Galatians and you read through the epistle to the

Galatians you're not very long into it before realizing that Paul is very annoyed he's writing as somebody who's really been provoked what is it that's provoked him why is he so annoyed as he writes to the Galatian church well because as he says they have departed from this doctrine they have departed from this very important matter of justification by faith alone they have added to faith things like circumcision or something else that they're able to do themselves something else to do the works of the law and what Paul is saying right at the beginning near the beginning of that letter in the first chapter if anyone brings to you another gospel to the one that we have announced in other words the gospel where this is really central and crucial to it let him be accursed a very strong incredibly strong language on the part of the apostle why is he saying let him be accursed why does he put it so strongly because he realizes that a gospel without justification by faith alone in Christ is not the gospel it's not setting out how we come to be set right with God and to the apostle that's hugely important because alternatives to that will lead people astray and leave people very likely lost in sin matters for Christ's glory it matters for the purity of the gospel it matters thirdly for personal salvation no other doctrine will as clearly set out your sin your inability and against that where you find hope and relief and freedom from condemnation justification by faith does all of that it sets out our inability our sinfulness our guilt and then it sets along with that and above that God's provision of righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus for personal salvation it's a vital doctrine and finally fourthly it's also a doctrine that's important and matters for personal assurance or for your security spiritually because justification is a done deed it's been accomplished where God actually justifies a sinner who believes in Jesus that justification that status is complete the moment God declares that person righteous in Christ that person is righteous from then on without any change in that status in other words your justification is as complete the moment God announces it as it will ever be because you see it's a status a status outside of ourselves God makes the announcement as it were the declaration that person is now righteous with the righteousness of my son that's not going to change the only way that's going to change is if God comes to find fault with the death of Jesus with anything to do with Jesus and that's not going to happen in other words your security and I think this is something we need to go back to more and more your personal sense of assurance of salvation and your security in that sense of assurance that you're saved and that you're one of the Lord's people well you don't how true you are to God or otherwise how much you understand of the gospel what extent your knowledge has reached how you are in relation to other people you don't do any of that in order to reach assurance you begin you might have to take some of that into account of course but your beginning is with this do [36 : 18] I truly believe in Jesus it's not saying is my faith great faith is my faith the kind of faith that never fluctuates it's never saying anything it doesn't say anything do I have true faith in Christ do I see in him everything I need to be right with God and have I received that by trusting in him well I'm justified if I do and if I'm justified then I'm justified forever in Romans chapter 8 Paul actually includes justification what you can call an unbreakable chain in Romans 8 and verse 30 those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified and those whom he justified he also glorified every link in that chain predestined called justified glorified is unbreakable it's

God's unbreakable chain of salvation justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law let's pray eternal God we give thanks today for your provision for us in your grace you have provided for us the redemption that is in Christ Jesus the righteousness that is in him help us we pray in our reaching forth by faith to be convinced of him and of his righteousness and to realize that we are indeed justified fully by you when we come to trust in him so receive our thanks for that we pray and continue with us now throughout this day and pardon all our sin for Jesus sake amen let's conclude by singing in psalm 85 this time let's sing psalm's version of it psalm 85 on page 113 and we're

singing verses 8 to 13 to

Stuttgart I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints he offers peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness surely for all those who fear him his salvation is at hand so that once again his glory may be seen within our land these four verses in psalm 85 in conclusion I will hear what God the Lord says to his saints he offers peace peace but his people must not wander and return to foolishness surely for all those who fear him his salvation is at hand so that once again his glory may be seen within our land love and truth have made together righteousness and peace embrace righteousness righteousness looks out from heaven from the earth swings faithfulness what is good the

Lord will give us and our land its fruit will bear righteousness will go before him and his royal way prepare if you let me get to the main door please after the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more amen