
CELEBRATING REFORMATION

FAITH ALONE

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on October 8, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Much ink and even blood has been spilled over the question, “How is a sinner made acceptable before God?”. There is good reason for such an interest in the question, for this question is one of supreme importance to every sinner. If you are perfectly righteous, then you have no interest in such a question. But if you are guilty of even a single moment of disobedience, then your acceptance before God is of paramount concern. In this message, we shall consider the biblical teaching on the manner in which any sinner is made acceptable, pure, and holy in God’s sight. Looking through the lenses of the Protestant Reformation, we shall investigate the past and the present need for clarity on this subject.

ROMANS 3:19-28 (ESV)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For ***by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.***

21 But now ***the righteousness of God has been manifested*** apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 ***the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.***

For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom ***God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*** This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that ***he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.***

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? ***It is excluded.*** By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For ***we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.***

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY

Jesus justifies any sinner through Faith alone, and true faith is always evident.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) THE REFORMATION PROTEST: PAST & PRESENT CONTRAST

(2) THE REFORMATION RENEWAL: CHRIST JUSTIFIES BY FAITH ALONE

(3) THE REFORMATION TODAY: JUSTIFYING FAITH IS NEVER ALONE

(4) APPLICATION: WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS?

MESSAGE

(1) THE REFORMATION PROTEST: PAST & PRESENT CONTRAST

- **The Material Cause of the Reformation**

- The Formal Cause was “*Sola Scriptura*”

- Who says? Who has the authority to speak on such a thing?

- The Material Cause was “*Sola Fide*”

- “*Salvation is by Faith Alone*” is a less specific way of saying, “*Justification is by Faith Alone.*”

- Is Christ a sufficient Savior, or must I contribute to my justification?

- “*Justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls*” (Martin Luther).

- This is a fight for the Gospel itself! The stakes could not be higher.

- R.C. Sproul: “*I’ll give up my relationship to any leader in Christendom over this doctrine; I’ll split my family over this doctrine; I’ll split the church over this doctrine. This is the gospel! If the Lord marks iniquity, who shall stand? Well, guess what? He does mark iniquity. And blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin.*”

- Tetzels sale of indulgences

- John Tetzels would roll into town with pomp and seriousness. He would display paintings of people burning, and even light fires around to enhance the affect.

Then Tetzels would say, *“Friends of this town, you have heard how your loved ones suffer in purgatory. You have heard their cries. The flames have reached up and licked your very own boots.”*

“How shamefully,” Tetzels would say, *“you go about your business. You spend your money on every little trifle. And, oh, how your loved ones suffer. Enough. Step forward. Leo X, the Pontifex Maximus, Vicar of Christ on earth, has been gracious and merciful to you and has affixed his seal to this indulgence.*

Now come and do your duty. And now you have a very special deal reserved for you. For a few coins, you can free yourself from purgatory. Yes, God be praised, give to the church and the gracious Holy Father in Rome will see to it that you and all your dead relatives will be in Paradise itself, not enduring for a moment the purging flames of purgatory.”

Then Tetzels recited the memorable claim: *“Every time a coin in the coffer rings, A soul from purgatory springs.”*

- Reformers & Protestants on Justification by Faith Alone

- Heidelberg Catechism (1563)¹

- 60. How are you righteous before God?

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. That is: although my conscience accuse me, that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and that I am still prone always to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.

¹ See full *Heidelberg Catechism* here: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/heidelberg-catechism-1563/>

- 61. What do you mean that you are righteous **only** by faith?

Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because **only the satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God**, and I can **receive** the same and **make it my own in no other way than by faith only**.

- Martin Luther (Commentary on Galatians 2:16)

- “It is a high and an excellent matter to **be at peace with God**; and therefore, in this case, we have need of a far better mediator than Moses or the Law. **Here we must be nothing at all, but only receive the treasure which is Christ, and apprehend Him in our hearts by faith— although we feel ourselves to be never so full of sin.**”²

- Second London Confession (1689)

- Of Justification
 - “**Faith** thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the **alone instrument of justification**...”³

- Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)

- Uses nearly the exact same language as the 2nd London.⁴

- The Baptist Faith & Message (1925, 1963, *1998, and 2000)

- Under the heading: “Salvation”
 - “Justification is God's gracious and **full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness** of all sinners who **repent and believe in Christ.**”⁵

² Martin Luther on Galatians regarding *Sola Fide*: <http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/3015/0420/1237/jbfa.pdf>

³ See the *Second London Confession* here: <http://www.1689.com/confession.html#Ch.%201>

⁴ See the *Westminster Confession* here: http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html

* There was only a slight amendment in 1998, and not a full revision.

⁵ See Baptist Faith and Message here: <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>

- **Rome on Justification**

- Council of Trent (1545-1563)

- Canon 9 on Justification

“If any one shall say, that *by faith alone the [sinner] is justified*; so as to mean that *nothing else is required to co-operate* in order *unto the obtaining the grace of justification... let him be anathema.*”⁶

- In other words, justification is by faith and good works.
- “*anathema*” – Conflict is equal to rejection of Christianity.

- Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

- Statement: “*Unitatis Redintegratio*” (Restoration of Unity)

- “*The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council... In recent times more than ever before... large numbers have felt the impulse [to unite all ‘Christian’ communions], and among our **separated brethren** also there increases from day to day the movement... for the restoration of unity... This movement toward unity is called ‘ecumenical.’*”⁷

- There is a kinder sentiment from Rome, but there has been absolutely no change of doctrine.⁸
- In fact, the full import of the Roman priesthood, tradition, and sacraments are reaffirmed in this same document.

⁶ <http://www.ecatholic2000.com/trent/untitled-18.shtml# Toc385685512>

⁷ See Rome’s statement on Ecumenical Restoration and Unity (*UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO*) here:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

⁸ See the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” in which the tone is incredibly kind. The doctrinal statements are obscure and/or contradictory, but there is a definite desire for unity from many on both sides.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, and still used today)
 - Justification is the “cleansing us from our sins and communicating to us ‘the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ’ **and through Baptism.**”⁹
 - **Baptism** is the first (chronological) sacrament of Rome, and all others follow from it.
 - This same teaching is held by the **Church of Christ** today.¹⁰
 - “We believe that through the atonement of Christ all men may be saved **by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel**, [which are] **Faith** in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ; **Repentance** and **Baptism**...”¹¹

- *Catholic Online* (contemporary source of all things RCC related)¹²
 - “There are **seven** sacraments (**Baptism, Eucharist** [‘unbloody’ sacrifice], **Confirmation, Penance** [contrition, confession, and satisfaction], **Anointing the Sick, Holy Orders** [authoritative and hierarchical priesthood], and **Matrimony**).”
 - “[The seven sacraments] are **necessary for salvation**. The sacraments are the **vehicles of grace** which they convey.”
 - The sacramental system does not merely exhibit faith or nourish faith; in Rome’s theology, it is the means by which a sinner is justified (with accompanying faith, of course).
 - Example: The **centrality** of the **Eucharist** and the “**alter**.”
 - **Reformation rejection** of an “alter,” and placement of the **pulpit** and **expositional preaching** (God’s Word).

Summary: Rome condemned Protestants in the past, and Rome kindly does the same today...

(Segue) *But, why all the fuss over justification?*

⁹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pg. 535, section 1987

¹⁰ See the SBC/NAMB description of the Church of Christ here: <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/churches-of-christ>

¹¹ See the “Basic Beliefs” of the *Church of Christ* here: <http://www.churchofchrist-tl.org/basicbeliefs.html>

¹² See full article and related links to the “seven sacraments” of the Roman Catholic Church here:

<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/sacrament.php>

(2) THE REFORMATION RENEWAL: CHRIST JUSTIFIES BY FAITH ALONE

19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For *by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

- The Law of God is good, but we are evil; thus, we are only condemned by it.
 - Luther: “But man’s *weakness* and *misery* is so great that, in the terrors of conscience and danger of death, *we behold nothing else but our works*, our worthiness, and the Law, which, when it shows us our sin, by and by *our past evil life comes to remembrance*... True it is, that of all things in the world, the *Law is most excellent*; yet is it not able to *quiet a troubled conscience*, but *increases terrors*, and drives it to *desperation*...”¹³

21 But now *the righteousness of God has been manifested* apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*

- The righteousness of God is imputed... passively... to the sinful believer.
 - Luther: “For in this we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but only we receive and suffer Another to work in us—that is to say, God. Therefore, it seems good to me to call this *righteousness of faith*, or *Christian righteousness*, the *passive righteousness*.”¹⁴

Paul goes on to explain:

For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom *God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith*. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

- God in *Christ is the active agent* of propitiatory (i.e. justifying) work.
 - The righteousness which sinners possess by faith is *extra nos!*

26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that *he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

- *Simul Justus et Peccator!*

¹³ Martin Luther on Galatians regarding *Sola Fide*: <http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/3015/0420/1237/jbfa.pdf>

¹⁴ Martin Luther on Galatians regarding *Sola Fide*: <http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/3015/0420/1237/jbfa.pdf>

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? ***It is excluded.*** By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For ***we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.***

- ***Boasting is excluded and Assurance is embraced!***
 - Luther: “*there is no comfort of conscience so firm and so sure as is this passive righteousness.*”¹⁵

Summary: **Whatever else we might say about salvation, justification is accomplished entirely by Christ, and we passively enjoy the benefits...**

(Segue) *But, doesn't this view lead to lawlessness?*

(3) THE REFORMATION TODAY: JUSTIFYING FAITH IS NEVER ALONE

- **The common American Evangelical view is lawlessness**
 - State of Theology (in cooperation with LifeWay research)¹⁶
 - 64% of Evangelicals believe that everyone goes to heaven to see their family when they die.
 - Pew Research (Baptists in America)¹⁷
 - 46% attend worship services 3 times a year or less.
 - 35% seldom or never gather to study their Bible or pray with others.
 - 34% look to their own common sense to judge right and wrong.
 - 48% believe that morality is measured by circumstance (*and not by an objective standard*).
 - 39% rarely if ever read their Bible.

¹⁵ Martin Luther on Galatians regarding *Sola Fide*: <http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/3015/0420/1237/jbfa.pdf>

¹⁶ See full “State of Theology” report here: <https://thestateoftheology.com>

¹⁷ See full “Baptists among Evangelicals” report here: <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-family/baptist-family-evangelical-trad/>

- **Scripture warns against lawlessness and empty 'faith'**
 - **James 2:14-18** – “14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he *has faith* but *does not have works*? Can *that faith save* him?”
 - “that [kind of] faith...” is James’s interest here
 - What kind of ‘faith’ is saving faith?
 - A. The kind that merely comes as words?
 - B. Or, the kind that is evidenced by works?
 - “15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and *one of you says* to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ *without giving* them the things needed for the body, *what good is that?*”
 - “saying” “without” doing... what good is that?
 - “17 So also *faith by itself*, if it does not have works, *is dead.*”
 - The kind of “faith” that only comes as words is a dead faith, which cannot save.
 - “18 But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and *I will show you my faith by my works.*”
 - The kind of “faith” that is evidenced by works is true, genuine, and saving faith.

Summary: Jesus justifies sinners through faith alone...

(Segue) And, true faith (the kind that actually saves) is never alone!

(4) APPLICATION: WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS?

- **Will you abandon your trust in anything but Christ?**
 - Non-Christian, will you put away any false hope in self or excuses?
 - Christian, will you bring only empty hands to Christ?

- **Will you cling to Christ by fully and only trusting Him?**
 - Will you stop measuring your identity by worldly standards?
 - Will you stop assessing your acceptability before God by looking at your own works?
 - Will you passively rest in the sufficient Savior of sinners like you?

- **Will you eagerly expect life-transformation to accompany faith?**
 - Will you look for life-transformation in yourself, inviting Christ to renovate you now, not merely to 'save' you sometime later?
 - Will you look for life-transformation in others, knowing that Christ is not mocked, and He will not save those remaining defiant toward Him?
 - Will you look for life-transformation in all Christians, understanding that Christ is a comprehensive Savior, and this is a beautiful Gospel?

Major Point: Jesus justifies any sinner through Faith alone, and true faith is always evident.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Standing Firm for Justification by Faith Alone by R.C. Sproul

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/standing-firm-doctrine-justification-faith-alone/>

Faith Alone by Ligon Duncan

<http://ligonduncan.com/faith-alone-1070/>

Justification by Faith Alone by Martin Luther

<https://www.monergism.com/justification-faith-alone-ebook>

Justification by Faith by Brian Schwertley

http://www.reformedonline.com/uploads/1/5/0/3/15030584/justification_by_faith.pdf

The Cambridge Declaration by Various

<http://www.alliancenet.org/cambridge-declaration>

Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent compiled by Theodore Buckley

<http://www.ecatholic2000.com/trent/untitled-114.shtml>