

“Justified by Faith Alone”  
(Romans 4:5)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. To this point, we’ve seen:
  - a. The Gospel is the message of what God has done through the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ, to save those who believe.
  - b. It’s the only way God has given to end the war between you and God and to reconcile you to Himself.
  - c. It’s the only means the Lord uses to save anyone.
2. Last week, we saw two related truths:
  - a. First, that when you communicate the Gospel, you are speaking to those who are unwilling and unable to listen to it, because they are dead in sin – they hate God, and His ways – there are no exceptions (though there are degrees of how much the Lord restrains their sin).
  - b. And second, that therefore the Lord must “break in” with His grace through the new birth to make them willing, to make them able, to receive it.
  - c. This is what He does for His elect.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we’re going to round off this mini-series by looking at two more very important Gospel truths.
  - a. The first is that through the Gospel, you are justified by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, apart from any works on your part.
  - b. The second is, that if you really are justified, you will do good works – you will become more like Jesus, your sanctification will follow your justification.
2. Let’s consider both of these for a few moments in a little more detail.

II. Sermon.

A. Let’s consider first, that through the Gospel you are justified by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, without any works on your part.

1. To understand this more fully, it would be helpful better to understand justification. What is it?
  - a. Justification is God’s full and final *declaration* that you are *just*.
    - (i) That you are *not guilty* of any sin.
    - (ii) But that you have done only what’s right from the time you were born to the present.
  - b. Basically, it means that the Lord declares you to be perfect.
    - (i) That you have the right to enter into heaven.

- (ii) That you have a right to all the blessings He has promised – especially the new heavens and the new earth.
  - (iii) Only those who are morally upright in every way can live with God in heaven – this is what He declares you to be.
2. But this raises a question that has been hotly debated in time past: How can the Lord declare you to be just or perfect, when you are in fact not perfect?
    - a. When you came into this world guilty of Adam’s sin.
    - b. When you’ve sinned every day in word, thought and deed, since you’ve come into the world – even at the best of times, even with God’s grace.
      - (i) There’s a sense in which Paul’s statement, “There is none who does good, there is not even one” applies even to believers (Rom. 3:12).
      - (ii) After all, Paul says in our passage that God “justifies the ungodly” (4:5).
    - c. How can God declare you to be perfect when you are a sinner?
  3. He can do this only because of what Jesus has done.
    - a. You are guilty of breaking His commandments, but if you’ve trusted Jesus, His death on the cross has removed your sins.
    - b. You haven’t obeyed perfectly, but if you believe in Him, His righteousness is credited to your account, so that you have a perfect record.
    - c. When you trust Jesus to save you, His atonement – His death on the cross – and His perfect obedience, were for you.
    - d. With all of your sins removed and Jesus’ perfect obedience credited to you, you are perfect in God’s eyes – that’s how He can declare you to be so.
    - e. And since Jesus’ work is all you need to be just in God’s eyes, you don’t need any works of your own.
    - f. What could you add anyway? All you have are sinful works. The only thing they deserve is judgment. Jesus and His works are all you need.
  4. This answers the next question: Why does this justification have to be by faith alone?
    - a. It’s because that’s the only way justification can be by grace alone, apart from your works.
    - b. Faith is just the opposite of works.
      - (i) Works looks to what is deserved.
        - (a) When you do something good, you expect payment.
        - (b) Justice demands payment.
      - (ii) But faith looks away from itself to Jesus Christ, that you might be justified/declared perfect by His works.
        - (a) Faith isn’t a work that you do to be justified – it’s looking to Jesus alone to justify you.
        - (b) Many well-meaning Christians believe that faith is a work you’re all capable of doing that can save you.

- (c) That's what they hear Paul saying when he says of Abraham, "His faith is credited as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5).
  - (d) But didn't Paul already tell us that Abraham was not justified by works (v. 2)? And that if we actually did works that deserved to be rewarded that salvation wouldn't be free; it wouldn't be by grace alone (v. 4)?
  - (e) Paul can't mean that Abraham's faith – his act of believing – was what God credited to him as his personal righteousness.
  - (f) Rather, he's means that in looking to Jesus – the promised Seed – in faith, the Lord gave Jesus' righteousness to him as a gift.
  - (g) Far from being works that saved Abraham, he was saved purely by grace.
- c. I hope you can see that faith isn't the only thing opposed to works: grace is too.
- (i) Grace, by definition, is something that can't be earned – it's something that must be given freely.
  - (ii) The same isn't true of works.
    - (a) Again, works demand a payment – a payment is the opposite of a gift.
    - (b) That's why Paul writes, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (11:6).
  - (iii) Justification – God's declaration that you are just, that you are perfect – is by grace alone, through faith alone, and because it is, your works have nothing to do with it.
- d. There is one more reason justification must be by grace alone through faith alone.
- (i) This is something we considered when we looked at Wesley and Toplady.
  - (ii) It had to be this way if the Lord was to receive all the glory alone.
    - (a) Remember, the Lord has done all that He has to reveal His glory.
    - (b) His greatest work is that of salvation – do you think He wants to share that glory with anyone else?
    - (c) No, He doesn't. He would have all the glory that rightly belongs to Him. He says through Isaiah, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another" (Isa. 42:8).
      - (1) Paul writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).
      - (2) And again, "Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:35-36).
- e. And so justification – God's declaration that you are morally perfect – is an act of His free grace, that you receive by faith alone, apart from any works on your part, that He might receive all the glory and you none.

- B. Second, let's consider that if you are justified, you will do good works.
1. Some conclude that since you are justified by grace alone, through faith alone apart from works, works aren't important.
    - a. But are they right?
    - b. No, you can't be saved without works.
  2. There is a sense in which justification actually is by works – *not your works*, but those of Jesus Christ, as we've seen.
    - a. If He hadn't obeyed the whole Law perfectly, if He hadn't gone to the cross in obedience to His Father, you couldn't be saved.
    - b. The Lord will only declare to be perfect what is perfect – Jesus is perfect, and so are you if you are trusting in Him.
  3. But *your* works are *also* important – you can't be saved without these either.
    - a. First, understand that we're not talking about *merit* here.
      - (i) Your works do not and cannot earn your salvation – if they could, then why did Jesus come to save you?
      - (ii) Paul writes, “If righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly” (Gal. 2:21).
    - b. What we're talking about is *evidence* – if you have been justified by faith, your life will be radically changed.
      - (i) Paul says this is *the reason* the Lord saved you – that you might do good works: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).
      - (ii) James says you can't have true saving faith without works: “For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:26).
      - (iii) And the author to the Hebrews says without holiness – without good works – you won't see heaven: “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).
    - c. When the Lord quickened you to life, when He gave you the new birth, He gave you His Holy Spirit.
      - (i) The Spirit is the One who opened your eyes and gave you the ability to trust in Jesus Christ.
      - (ii) But He also changed your heart and made you into a new creature.
        - (a) From that moment on, the Spirit has been working His holy image in you; He is making you like Jesus – this is what Peter means when he says that you have become a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).
        - (b) If your life hasn't changed, if you're not becoming more like Jesus – then you don't have the Spirit, then you haven't truly believed, and you are not justified.

- (c) Sanctification must always follow justification – they always go together and are never separated even for a moment of time.
- (iii) That's why works are just as necessary under the covenant of Grace as they were under the Covenant of Works, but for a different reason.
  - (a) In the Covenant of Works, you would have been saved on the merits of Adam's works.
  - (b) In the Covenant of Grace, you are saved by the merits of Christ's work.
  - (c) But in the Covenant of Grace, the works *you do* are the evidence that you have been transformed by His grace.
  - (d) This is, by the way, the reason why the Lord will examine your works on the Day of Judgment, rather than your profession – it's because your works plainly show what you really are.
  - (e) It doesn't matter what you say if your works show otherwise.
  - (f) The only evidence He will accept is the evidence of good works.
- 4. And so what do your works show about you?
  - a. Do they show you have been justified by God's grace? Or do they show that you really don't know Him at all?
  - b. This is perhaps the best way to know whether or not you're saved:
    - (i) The Spirit does bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.
    - (ii) But He most often points to the same evidence Jesus will be looking for on the Day of His judgment: your works.
  - c. And so are you a new creature in Jesus Christ? Do you know that you've been saved by His grace?
    - (i) If not, then turn to Jesus now in faith and ask Him to change your heart and make you a new creature.
    - (ii) If you do see His grace in your life, don't forget why it's there – the life and death of Jesus Christ.
    - (iii) That's what you need to remember as you prepare to come to the Table. Amen.

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