

FBC POWELL, 10-22-17 AM NOTES
Sola Fide – “Faith Alone”
Romans 3:22-26
5 in Series, “What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Reformation”

Job 9:2b “But how can a man be in the right before God?”

Luke 18:18 “A ruler questioned Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’”

Acts 16:30b “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Jude 1:3b (ESV) “...the faith that was **once for all** delivered to the saints.”

“The teaching of the New Testament on this point is quite uncomplicated. At least one hundred times we read that faith in Christ is the means by which a sinner is declared forgiven and gladly received by the Almighty.”
—Erwin Lutzer

“Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and declares us to be righteous in His sight.”
—Wayne Grudem

“Justification is the gracious act of God by which he declares a sinner righteous solely through faith in Jesus Christ. Unearned. Unmerited. Incredible.”
—David Platt

“Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God whereby He declares those united to Christ to be righteous (in right standing) before Him because Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to them.”

Romans 3:10 says, “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one.’”

2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Regeneration is when God does a work in us that opens our blinded minds that we might see and believe on the Lord Jesus and become what **2 Peter 1:4** calls “a partaker of the divine nature.”

Sanctification is a neverending process (until Heaven) that is truly experiential, where we appropriate by faith what happened to us on the cross when we were crucified with Christ and given a new identity and then, through the work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, become progressively conformed to the image of Christ.

Romans 8:29 “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.”

“Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgment of God with respect to us. The distinction is that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. This is not what a judge does—he gives a verdict regarding our legal status.”
—Dr. John Murray

I. The Source of Justification—Grace Alone (v. 24)

Romans 8:1a “Therefore there is now no condemnation...”

Romans 3:20a “Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight...”

Romans 3:11b “There is none who seeks for God.”

II. The Payment for Justification—The Blood of Jesus Christ (v. 25)

III. The Means of Justification—Faith Alone (vv. 22, 26)

Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God.*”

“All is of God; the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.”
—William Temple

1. Knowledge—Our faith has an object; it is based on objective facts. John Calvin said, “Faith rests upon knowledge, not upon pious ignorance.”
2. Mental Assent—A person must accept the truths or the facts of the Gospel as being true.
3. Trust or Commitment—Saving faith has that element of total reliance on Christ to save us.

IV. The Justness of Justification (v. 26)

The word “impute” is an accounting term and means to put on one’s account.

The Bible speaks of three imputations. First, the consequences of Adam’s sin were imputed to us because we were in Adam (Romans 5:12). Second, our sins were imputed to Christ on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). Third, Christ’s righteousness was imputed to those who are justified through faith alone.

Philippians 3:9 (NKJV) “And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”

And Can It Be (Charles Wesley)

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine.*

The Solid Rock (Edward Mote)

*When He shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.*

Before the Throne of God Above (Charitie Lees Smith Bancroft)

*Behold Him there, the risen Lamb,
My perfect spotless righteousness.*

Knowing You (Graham Kendrick)

*Knowing You, Jesus,
Knowing You, there is no greater thing.
You’re my all, You’re the best,
You’re my joy, my righteousness
And I love You, Lord.*

Sermon 5: *Sola Fide* – “Faith Alone”

Romans 3:22-26

Before the Protestant Reformation began in 1517, the church taught that Christ’s sacrifice was necessary for salvation; they taught that grace was necessary to be saved; they taught that faith was necessary to be rightly related to God. Their problem was with that little word, *alone*. The Church of Rome taught that Christ, grace, and faith are *necessary conditions* of salvation, but not *sufficient conditions*. They taught that grace was necessary, but not enough. Added to grace was the sinner’s merit. They taught that faith was necessary, but faith alone was not enough. Added to faith there must be works to procure salvation. The eye of the hurricane of the reformation was that little word, “alone.”

When it comes to eternity, what is the most important question a person could ask? Let me give you three versions of that most important question. The first is in Job 9:2b: “But how can a man be in the right before God?” Here is another version of that same question. Luke 18:18 “A ruler questioned Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Here is a third version of basically that same question. A Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas in Acts 16:30b: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

In the beginning of the 16th century, a clear biblical answer to that question was very, very rare. The visible church had so complicated and distorted the truth that few could find a clear answer to that basic question. Here is the root of the problem in 1517 AD (the year historians generally accept as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation). The church had accepted a dual source of authority. There was the authority of the Scriptures, but there was also the authority of the traditions of the church – church councils, and the “infallible” declarations of the various popes when they spoke “*ex cathedra*” which is literally “from the chair” meaning the chair of Peter, from whom they claimed to have a direct line of authority. Here was (is) the problem with this dual source of authority: the traditions of the church and the Papal Dictates often conflicted with the Scriptures. When that happened, the traditions including the dictates of the various popes took precedence over the Scriptures. The real authority in the Roman church (both in the 16th century and still today in Roman Catholicism) is its councils, traditions and papal dictates. Mike Powell just this past week gave me a recent quote from the current pope – Pope Francis that speaks of God’s Word as being “a dynamic reality ... that progresses and grows.” In other words, he was saying that God’s Word changes. Compare that to Jude 1:3b (ESV): “...the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

By the time we get to October 31, 1517 (the generally accepted beginning of the Protestant Reformation), there was no clear answer to the Philippian jailor’s question in Acts 16:30b: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The simple truths of the Word of God had been perverted into complicated systems and rituals that kept people *connected* to the church but *separated* them from true salvation and the basic biblical truths of Scripture Alone, Christ Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and the Glory of God Alone.

Let me clearly state once again that the problem is not with the Scripture! The Scriptures are crystal clear when it comes to those questions we looked at earlier: “How can a man be in the right before God?” “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Erwin Lutzer says it well: “The teaching of the New Testament on this point is quite uncomplicated. At least one hundred times we read that faith in Christ is the means by which a sinner is declared forgiven and gladly received by the Almighty.” [Erwin Lutzer *The Doctrines That Divide*, page 83]

The real problem is that at the beginning of the Reformation, the common people had no access to the Scriptures in their own language, and the priests were so bound up by the traditions that

they neither understood, nor appropriated, nor taught the simple scriptural truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the Glory of God alone.

To understand this fourth “sola” of “faith alone,” we must understand the word *justification*. This word is so important that the remainder of this message focuses primarily on it! The word “justification” has its roots in the law courts. It describes the act of a judge acquitting an accused person. Allow me to give you several definitions of justification.

Wayne Grudem – “Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and declares us to be righteous in His sight.”

David Platt defines it this way, “Justification is the gracious act of God by which he declares a sinner righteous solely through faith in Jesus Christ. Unearned. Unmerited. Incredible.”

Here is my favorite definition. “Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God whereby He declares those united to Christ to be righteous (in right standing) before Him because Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to them.”

Let’s analyze that last definition. We have no righteousness of our own. Romans 3:10 says, “as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one.’” We have no righteousness and if we are going to be in right standing before God, we must obtain righteousness from another source. Martin Luther described the righteousness of a Christian as “an alien righteousness.” What did he mean by that? He meant that it must come from outside of us. This “alien righteousness” is Christ’s righteousness imputed to us or put on our account when we are united with Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Notice in our definition that justification is called a “legal act.” That emphasizes the fact that justification is something God declares, and it is not something we experience in the realm of emotions. To justify is to make a legal declaration that a person is righteous (in right standing with God). What we are dealing with here is *the heart of the Gospel*. You *MUST* get this. The dividing line between the true Gospel and false gospels is this issue of justification by faith alone!

Someone may object and say, “But doesn’t salvation change us at the core of our being and make us into a new creation?” Yes! Salvation changes us internally and that internal change in our very nature always begins working its way out into our attitudes, desires, and actions. Stay with me while I give you some big words which I will define as I give them. At salvation, there is an internal change that is the result of regeneration (the new birth), not justification. Regeneration is when God does a work in us that opens our blinded minds that we might see and believe on the Lord Jesus and become what 2 Peter 1:4 calls “a partaker of the divine nature.” Sanctification is a never-ending process (until Heaven) that is truly experiential where we appropriate by faith what happened to us on the cross when we were placed in union with Christ and given a new identity. Then through the work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God become progressively conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Justification does not contradict in any way regeneration (our becoming a new creation in Christ) or sanctification (our ongoing being conformed to the likeness of Christ). Justification compliments them but is separate from them. Justification has to do with our standing before a holy God. Dr. John Murray does a good job of showing us this distinction: “Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgment of God with respect to us. The distinction is that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. This is not what a judge does – he gives a verdict regarding our legal status.” [Quoted in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 724] The weakness of that illustration is that in reality, God is both the surgeon who does something in us and the judge who gives a verdict regarding our legal status before Him. The Reformation focused on “How is a person justified? How can we be righteous before a holy God?” Let’s examine justification a little more closely.

I. The Source of Justification – Grace Alone (v. 24)

How do we get from Romans 3:10 where we are told that there is none righteous to Romans 8:1a: “Therefore there is now no condemnation...”? It could not have been by our merit or good works because we are told in Romans 3:20a: “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight...” The only explanation for God justifying those who are saved is that it is an act of His amazing grace! It is His unmerited favor. We not only could never merit righteousness before God, we weren’t even seeking it! Romans 3:11b: “There is none who seeks for God.” God stooped down to one so undeserving as me and justified me because of His grace.

II. The Payment for Justification – The Blood of Jesus Christ (v. 25)

Two weeks ago, we talked some about “propitiation,” but I want to go a little deeper by tying it in to its Old Testament roots. Propitiation basically means to satisfy or appease God’s wrath toward our sin. In Leviticus 16 we read about the Day of Atonement. In the Day of Atonement, we see a very clear picture of our salvation in Christ. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest the shed blood from an animal sacrifice into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Allow me to explain one item that was in the Holy of Holies. It was the Ark of the Covenant. In Exodus 37:1-9 we learn that the Ark of the Covenant was a box made of acacia wood that was 3’9” long, 2’3” wide and 2’3” high. It was overlaid with gold and inside were the tablets of the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The lid on the Ark of the Covenant was called “the mercy seat.” It was on the mercy seat that the blood of the sacrificed animal was sprinkled. Do you see the symbolism of the mercy seat? The mercy seat with the shed blood stood between the sinful people who had broken God’s law and the wrath of God over that broken law.

Jesus is our mercy seat, our propitiation and instead of the blood of an innocent animal, He shed His own blood that the wrath of God, poured out on Him, might be appeased. For those who come to Christ in *faith alone* their sins are sent away never to return. About 270 BC, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek – the prominent language of that time. That translation was called the Septuagint. The Greek word they used in the Septuagint to translate the lid on the Ark of the Covenant – the Mercy Seat is the word used in Romans 3:25 that is translated “propitiation.” We could translate verse 25, “Whom God displayed publicly as our mercy seat by His blood.” Our sin (cosmic treason against God) stirs God’s wrath. God Himself provided the propitiation [satisfaction] for His wrath. Christ’s substitutionary atonement – the shedding of His blood, the pouring out of His life – satisfied or propitiated the just wrath of God because now our sins are forgiven, sent out, put as far from us as the East is from the West! The payment for our justification is the shed blood of Christ.

III. The Means of Justification – Faith Alone (vv. 22, 26)

I went over this point quickly in an earlier message in this series, but I want to go a little deeper. I’m going to get rather technical about faith here. I want no one to misunderstand, thinking we have to understand all these intricacies to be saved. I was a child who probably had never heard the words propitiation, justification, imputation, and certainly not the three elements of saving faith that I am going to share with you. I was saved when God did an awakening work in me and opened my blinded eyes to see that I was a sinner in desperate need of a Savior. I understood that He died in my place, and the Spirit of God drew me to Him and I wanted to know Him and His forgiveness. I hated my sinfulness and I turned from my sin and called on Him in prayer to save me, and believed that He did. I got saved never hearing of all these double-jointed words like propitiation, justification, regeneration, sanctification, etc. So why do we need to even strain

our brain to understand them now? There are many reasons, but the main ones for me are so that I can worship Him more accurately and love Him more deeply. I can never learn too much about the cross! I can never learn too much about this atonement, this grace, this love and this Savior who gave His life for mine. I love John Newton's testimony that ends with "I am a great sinner and He is a great Savior." But I don't want to stop there. I want to love Him as Matthew 22:37 says with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my *mind*!

Now, let's get back to the means of our justification – faith alone. We are saved *through faith*, or *by means of faith*, but *not on account of our faith or on the basis of our faith*. Faith is not the basis or the foundation of our justification; faith is the instrument by which we are united to Christ in whom is justification. Faith is not a work or a merit for justification. Faith links us to Christ and in Christ we receive the gracious gift of salvation. Even the faith is a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God.*" To what does "the gift of God" refer? The grammar leads us to believe it refers to grace; it refers to salvation; and it refers to faith! I love this quote by William Temple: "All is of God; the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed." [Sinclair Ferguson, *In Christ Alone*, page 42]

This faith that is the instrument of our justification has three elements:

1. Knowledge – Our faith has an object; it is based on objective facts. Our presentation of the Gospel must include some facts: The person of Christ (God who became man), the cross and what happened there, his resurrection, the necessity of repentance and faith as a minimum. John Calvin said, "Faith rests upon knowledge, not upon pious ignorance."
2. Mental Assent – A person must accept the truths or the facts of the Gospel as being true. In other words, a person denies that Jesus is God become man cannot be saved. A person that rejects the substitutionary atonement cannot be saved. A person who rejects the literal bodily resurrection of Christ cannot be saved. There must be mental assent to the facts of the Gospel. Let me hasten to say that having these two elements of faith is not saving faith. In fact, the Devil and the demons he commands have these first two elements of faith.
3. Trust or Commitment – Saving faith has that element of total reliance on Christ to save us. It is in this third element of faith that I enter into a personal relationship with Christ and I am justified, forgiven, and can walk in communion and intimacy with Him.

IV. The Justness of Justification (v. 26)

I mentioned earlier that justification involves both the forgiveness of sins, and the imputation of righteousness. The way some people present justification makes it almost sound like God is playing a game of some kind – "We are not righteous, but God just decides to see us as righteous." No, we have a genuine and perfect righteousness, and yet we have no righteousness of our own. How can this be? It all centers on this biblical word "imputation." The word "impute" is an accounting term and means to put on one's account. Sometimes the word that is translated "accounted" (Romans 4:3, 22).

The Bible speaks of three imputations.

First, the consequences of Adam's sin were imputed to us because we were in Adam (Romans 5:12).

Second, our sins were imputed to Christ on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Third, Christ's righteousness was imputed to those who are justified through faith alone (Philippians 3:9 (NKJV)) "and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith").

Let's revisit the question of how God could be just and yet justify (declare to be righteous) those who are in Christ Jesus? It is because our sins were imputed to Christ who paid the propitiation price for them (His shed blood), and then Christ's perfect righteousness was imputed to us. In union with Christ, we stand before God with sins forgiven and in the perfect righteousness of Christ and that allows God, as Romans 3:26 says, to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." HALLELUJAH!

It is interesting how this truth of the imputation of Christ's righteousness shows up over and over in theologically based hymns of the past and the present.

And can It Be by Charles Wesley in 1738:

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine*

The Solid Rock by Edward Mote in 1832:

*When He shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.*

Before the Throne of God Above by Charitie Lees Smith Bancroft in 1863:

*Behold Him there, the risen Lamb,
My perfect spotless righteousness*

Knowing You by Graham Kendrick in 2001:

*Knowing You, Jesus,
Knowing You, there is no greater thing.
You're my all, You're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love You, Lord.*

Justification by faith alone is the key to the Gospel. It's not in merit (my righteousness); it is in Christ alone and the only way we can have His righteousness is to be united to Him by faith – knowing the basic facts, believing them as true, turning from everything else and trusting in and committing myself to Him alone.