

# By Faith

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Romans 3:21-26

What comes into your mind when you hear the word, “faith”?

Faith is clearly important in the Scriptures. We know God made the world and all that is in it by faith. By faith, the father of the faithful, Abraham, was justified. You cannot please God without faith. And we come to him believing that he is and is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

This great gospel book of Romans began with the ringing of the bells of faith – the good news of salvation is for all those who believe, and the just shall live by faith!

We should have very clear and well-defined thoughts about faith, but we live in a day where faith is not so.

For so many faith is a very mystical, foggy, and slippery idea. We see all kinds of different beliefs lumped as one as ‘people of faith’. That doesn’t help! How did we get to this point? Well, you can thank the philosopher Immanuel Kant for this. Kant put all that is religious or spiritual, faith included, into its own private closet; set apart from this world where what is what is thoughtful and rational is important..

And so faith became feeling oriented and irrational, an undefined “whatever”.

This doesn’t sit well with either Roman Catholic teachings nor of Bible-believing Protestants with their rich creeds (remember, creed means, “I Believe!”)

It does open the door to all kinds of mystical and crazy expressions.

I remember the story of doctor whose wife became a Christian. Joe was raised a Roman Catholic but was not going to church. When Peggy his wife trusted Jesus for her Savior, he thought she believed all the nonsense you can see on religious programming today. That, to him, was faith! So he had to toss all of that overboard before he in time came to trust the Lord Jesus as well.

We are saved by faith. As we said already, without faith, it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God. Likewise, unbelief is an awful sin all throughout the Scriptures.

Over 500 times, some form of faith, belief, trust – in both noun and verb forms – is scattered throughout the whole Bible.

And it is a central concern in this central passage on justification in Romans 3. Nine times the word faith is found in 21-31. We will see faith another 16 times in chapter 4.

Perhaps the best way to summarize this concept here is in verse 28 – read it.

Do you know what faith is? Why it is so important? How it is to function in the life of sinners coming to the grace and salvation of God?

Let's face it:

- We cannot live comfortably before God without a clear and true faith.

- We cannot communicate to our children or unsaved loved ones what it means to become a Christian if we are uncertain regarding faith.
- We may even find ourselves lost goats at the Last Day, if we are deceived or led astray regarding faith.

So let us hear as for eternity, as for the glory of God and the blessing of our own souls today.

Let us consider three points here – **where faith is found, how faith functions, and what faith forbids.**

The first point is to get our bearings on where faith is found or placed. This chapter addresses some giant truths of God’s righteousness, justification by grace, the payment for sin in Christ’s blood, all witnessed by the prophets.

So here we must step back and be reminded – before jumping to the question of “do I have faith?” – and hear how the Bible tells us where faith fits.

In other words, God has not given us a gospel that says, ‘ok now, go ahead and do with this gospel as you please.’

He tells us clearly where faith comes in, how it is to act, what we are to know about it, before we come to Christ.

And where faith is found is under, and after, and around God’s salvation, God’s righteousness provided in His Son’s wonderful cross.

We cannot have faith until we know what the Father is giving us through Jesus Christ.

So, we take what we have been taught in the previous two Sundays – these are the pillars for our faith to lay hold on and to trust.

We said that this justification through the righteousness of God is an easy matter for us, while quite costly for the Father and the Son.

And our God intends it to be easy for us; He has made that part of His very own message to us.

This faith – as 22 tells us – belongs **with** the righteousness of God in Jesus.

This faith – as 25 tells us – belongs **with** this public display of propitiation in the blood of Jesus.

This faith – as 26 tells us – belongs **with** Jesus, **in** Jesus, as we are justified sinners, by the grace of God.

He holds out His faith-righteousness verses law-righteousness; that is, what is displayed, held forth for all to understand and then receive – if I can put it this way: “the righteousness-of-God-through-faith-in-Jesus-Christ”. This is what is manifested.

God is saying: “My righteousness in My Son’s Death is to and for faith”. It is not only designed to be received by faith; no, faith is part of the free offer and message of the gospel; that all who believe will be saved!

This is the best explanation why there is this repetition, this redundancy in verse 22.

Paul is expanding on what the righteousness of God apart from the Law in 21 is all about.

He adds that it is through faith and in Jesus Christ.

Why then say ‘to all who believe at the end,’ if he has already said we need to have faith a few words earlier?

It seems best to take that first faith as the very message itself, and the second faith – the intention of this message – to be believed, “for all who believe.”

This is what is manifested; this is the great NOW; this is what the OT testified to; this righteousness of God in Christ through faith.

It is God’s righteousness in Jesus – it is not of ourselves.

It is God’s revealed righteousness through faith – it is not of works!

This is the billboard! This is the “As Advertised” part of the message itself.

The message is faith: righteousness through faith – 22; propitiation by faith – 25; justified by faith – 26.

The great John Calvin observed on this passage – three causes advertised for your salvation:

1. The ***Efficient*** Cause – God’s Grace is first. He gave His Son, He provided a Redeemer, He so loved us that He gave this gift.
2. The ***Meritorious*** Cause – the Death of Jesus on the Cross. Jesus paid it all; we cannot add a penny to His finished work which is for doomed and lost SINNERS.
3. Then, the ***Instrumental*** Cause – that is faith. All who believe are justified; faith is simply receiving what is right there – this message of faith, this salvation for faith, this grace intended to be believed, and oriented exclusively to the simple reception of this gift, this present. This is what we find later in Romans 6:23. Quote!

So see here: faith is not your Savior. Faith is not God's gracious acceptance of us. Faith is the non-meriting resting on Jesus – without which we cannot be saved, cannot be justified, cannot have eternal life.

This brings us front and center to *How Faith Functions*, our second point.

Gladly faith is defined for us; we are not left guessing its character and qualities.

The Bible teaches that there is a false faith and a true; a living faith and a dead faith; a faith that is trying to earn its way to heaven, and a faith that receives salvation as a gift, all of grace.

So we are warned as well as instructed.

We know, we understand, says Hebrews 11, by faith; faith has an intellectual content about it; it involves our thinking, our minds, our knowledge.

In fact, knowing is a *synonym* for faith – this is eternal life, that they may *know* You, the One Eternal God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Faith is not in an *unknown* God, but the true God revealed in Scripture.

Faith follows what it knows to be true. Nobody, and I mean **NOBODY**, trusts in anything they know to be false, or unreal!

Faith is not a leap in the dark, but a leap into the light. What we believe makes sense to our minds.

So faith goes further than mere intellectual pieces – there is an assurance of what we are to believe. We really believe Christ is the Savior sent from heaven to redeem a great host of mankind.

This is evident in the Greek word itself; the word “pistos” means to be persuaded. This is why it is more than mere head knowledge, but the heart believes, trusts, goes forth to this wonderful God and Father brought to us by the Son.

Without such persuasion, there never could be love for the Lord; how could we trust Him and come to Him joyfully without it?

But the most important piece about faith touches on the *will*. The will in man is the *foot* of the soul, and in faith, it is our actually coming to Jesus.

We may know the gospel, be persuaded by the gospel, and believe it is the only way – and yet not step into this way, not actually receive this wonderful gift! You see, we continue to deeply trust ourselves, rest in our own goodness or religion or sacrifices.

Faith; simple, childlike faith, depends upon God’s Son alone for eternal salvation: John 3:16.

See this is where poor souls go astray by not simply believing upon Christ as they turn from their own sins!

I promised you last time that there are plenty of ways sinful flesh will twist and pervert faith. Let me highlight them for us:

There are those who add to the faith – most notoriously, the Roman Catholic Church. Though there are members of that church that do believe the gospel, the church denies that faith and are opposed to it as found in the Bible. Not faith alone, but faith plus works, say they; faith plus what the Church tells you to do, keeps you saved. They have not heard Paul in Romans 3:28.

They misquote and abuse James, and make Paul to be out of accord with James; and in the end, silence Paul. We don’t believe you have to choose that way. Paul and James are not enemies, but fighting against

different foes. Paul fights here against *dead works*. James in chapter 2 of his book, fights *dead faith*.

How do we have dead works? Try to be justified by them! Mix faith and works together in justification! How do we have dead faith? Well, it is a faith that remains alone; that does not show a new life in Christ by growth in holiness.

Such are the adders.

Then there are the subtracters from faith.

There are those who say that faith is not an instrument to bring us to God; that sins are not imputed to the Lamb or that righteousness is not reckoned to our account. Faith is only a badge, replacing circumcision in the New Covenant; faith is not about getting saved, it is about remaining in the people of God.

The recent heresies of the Federal Vision and the New Perspective have redefined Reformed and Protestant teachings on faith into something radically different, into a rank externalism.

There are further those who **multiply** faith and so destroy it. There are several strains which would make faith a *new law* we obey. Here faith is our Savior; faith is everything. The Word of Faith movement has placed man at the center of salvation. God is a giant potential that we, by faith, tap into and manipulate as we please. Just “Name It and Claim it!” – that’s faith! Not it is not!

Finally, there are the **dividers** – those who slice faith down from its rest in Jesus as your Savior, to be *any* kind of faith whatsoever. Any sense of dependence becomes true saving faith. It doesn’t really matter the Object of that faith, which is all-important. It should be in God in Christ Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. But this group says, NO, just have faith. This is in line with Immanuel Kant, and the chief architect is *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, the father of liberalism. He insisted that



ALL who trust, ALL who depend, ALL who have a sense of dependence, are God's children indeed! That means everybody is! And this has led to universalism: that all are saved and going to heaven, which is a bold-faced lie and denial of the Scriptures.

True faith, saving faith, is the alone *instrument* God Himself has ordained, to bring us to His Son. If we come some other way, we come as enemies sneaking in the window or the back door. God calls you to come to Him boldly, plainly, simply, through His wide-open front door.

He has said, 'this is how my righteousness is given' – this is what we have called a 'faith-righteousness' – and it is only in this way that we receive the gospel. Come, and you will see!

To come some other way, is to destroy this centerpiece of His love and grace! To destroy the glorious answer to His justice and wrath! To rob Him of His glory, and thus falling short again in an even deeper way than your fall in Adam!

Jesus said that it will be more tolerable for those who have not had the gospel preached to them than it will be for Capernaum or any place where the gospel is published and sinners turn away! Wow! More tolerable in Sodom and Gomorrah!

We come now to consider our third point: *what faith forbids*. We have seen where faith is *found*, or *fits* in God's plan of salvation; how faith *functions* as an instrument to bring us to Christ; lastly, what faith *forbids* – and also, what faith *promotes* – as we hear the Spirit in 27-31.

Gospel Faith first of all forbids pride, boasting in ourselves – 27. Add any work, any ritual you want, OT or New, and you are not only knocking down the chief glory of the gospel, you are exalting yourself.

That's right – if you do not come to Christ, do not turn to this answer for all sinners – you are arrogant, and pride through unbelief is the chief sin of man.

Faith boasts in Christ; let Him who glories, glory in this, that they know Me!

God commands all everywhere to repent. He doesn't suggest it. He makes it a law, a law of faith.

Yes, He invites, tenderly and softly and lovingly, “sinner come home.” But he also commands you to turn to him; turn now for you right now are under the wrath of God.

All you need do is humble yourself! Will you not do that? Can you not do that?

Secondly, Gospel Faith excludes works – how many times must the Bible say it? No man shall be justified by the works of the Law; no flesh is accepted by what it does; all are condemned without the cross of Jesus.

Oh, there is plenty of work to be done in our sanctification! There is plenty in our fight against sin in our daily walk! But never, never, never do we look at such deeds as the ground or basis of our justification, the basis of our being saved.

Third, Gospel Faith forbids sectarianism – 29-30: that only Jews, or only Gentiles; only men, only westerners, only easterners, only wealthy, only whites, only moralists may come!

The different prepositions here: by faith and through faith, are equivalents. In Galatians, Paul reverses them for the Jew and Gentile. All people are saved in the same way.

What kind of gospel eyes are we looking through? Walk into just about any store here in Southern California – well, outside of Little

Saigon – what do you see? Hispanics, Asians, Blacks, Indians, Arabs. Lost or found? Condemned in their sins or justified by the blood through faith?

Lastly, Gospel Faith Prohibits an anti-law view – 31. The word for this is “antinomianism”.

Does all of grace mean no of law? Well, yes, when we are talking about justification.

But what leads us to turn from our sins to Christ? The Law. Why? Because the Law is evil, or bad? Not at all – if it were, why would Christ fulfill it?

And if we were law-breakers, and now God has saved us from the condemnation of the law, is the law now not at all important? Do we believe it is what God wants when we are outside of Christ, but not what God wants when we are brought inside of Him?

Paul says the law is established by faith and not opposite to it.

How so? In two ways: *First*, we let the law of God say all it wants to say to our sins, our guilt – because we cannot pacify the law, but we have One who can and does – Jesus! And *second*, we love the law of God after we are saved from sin’s guilt, having it written on our hearts. Grace now conforms us to Christ Himself, who always did walk in the righteousness of the Law.

Amen? Faith says Amen! More on this will come next week.

Until then, may the Lord teach us more deeply and practically, how we are trust in him.