

Kids, do you know what Tuesday is? Happy Reformation Day. If you are new to Christianity, we are a Baptist church, but Baptist history can be traced back to the events of the Protestant Reformation. Before being Baptist, we are Protestant. And the protestation is not merely a matter of history but ongoing reality. Here at S.S. we are deliberately Protestant, therefore we celebrate the Reformation. Not to say it was all rosy or that all the Protestant Reformers were flawless. Far from it, actually. But the truths coming out of the Reformation are truths we cherish. Particularly, the 5 Solas: Scripture Alone, Christ, Grace, Faith, To the glory of God alone.

We love these truths, but many Protestants no longer champion them. As the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it years ago, we are living in the land of Protestantism w/o the Ref. CT did a study in 2017¹ on “Protestant self-awareness” and the results showed that 52% of American Protestants said that faith plus good deeds are needed to get to heaven. About the same thought that we need church traditions and teaching to supplement the Bible. When asked what it meant to be Protestant, 32% said “not Catholic.” True, but I want you to have better answers than that!

We need to know why we are Protestant and we need to see Rome as a mission field. That is not to say there are no Christians in the Roman Catholic Church! Heavens no, but it is to say they are Christians in spite of the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching. And for the Christians there, they are being led astray from Scripture. You need to know why you are a Protestant and how to talk with Catholic friends about these eternally important issues.

We believe in Scripture Alone. Rome believes that authority is found in Scripture *and* tradition, on the same level. Church leaders are the authority according to Rome. So, Pope Boniface, in his papal bull (*bull*a meaning seal), *Unam Sanctam*, had this to say in 1302: “Consequently we declare, state, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” To be saved you must submit to the Pope! Whatever he and the bishops (the magisterium) issue is to be believed. The RCC catechism states that the church does not “derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reference.”²

Of course, when one allows for men to make up truth, you end up with all sorts of teaching that is found nowhere in God’s Word, mostly revolving around Mariology. For example, listen to this prayer to Mary that is common in Catholic piety: “O Mother of Perpetual Help, thou art the dispenser of all the good which God grants to us miserable sinners . . . Obtain for me, then, the pardon of my sins, love for Jesus, final perseverance, and the grace always to have recourse to thee, O Mother of Perpetual Help.”³ We believe in Christ alone.

Other key Catholic doctrines like the immaculate conception of Mary (no original sin) in mid 1800’s, perpetual virginity (Jesus had brothers and sisters). In 1950’s they decided that Mary ascended bodily into heaven and didn’t see grave. The celibacy of the priesthood (even Peter, supposedly the first Pope, was married). They make up different kinds of sins: mortal and venial, which is not found in Scripture. Transubstantiation, where the elements of communion literally become the literal body and blood of Jesus as the priest says “hoc est corpus meum,” Latin this is my body, from which we derive the phrase “hocus pocus.” The idea of purgatory has no biblical basis. It is the belief that Christ did not fully atone for our sin so it is a place between earth and heaven where we are purged of our sin until we are made fit for heaven. Then there is their teaching on

¹ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/august/500-reformation-protestants-catholics-luther-sola-fide-pew.html>

² Catechism, 82, 31.

³ White, 212.

indulgences, the remission of sins so you'll spend less time in purgatory. A few years ago, the Pope granted indulgences to Catholics who followed him on Twitter.

So, there are several things for Protestant Christians to protest, but the heart of the matter is justification by faith alone: *sola fide*. So, this morning, I want to focus on the heart of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther said "This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour." He called it the "first and chief article." He said, "This doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough. If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time." He said "One cannot go soft or give way on this article, for then heaven and earth would fall."⁴ He said "Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, . . . even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. . . [it is the article] on which the church stands or falls."

John Calvin, another Protestant Reformer, said justification by faith alone is the principle hinge on which all true religion turns. Talking about Rome, Calvin said justification "is the first and keenest subject of controversy between us." Calvin said, "Wherever the knowledge of it is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion abolished, the Church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown."⁵ Spurgeon said, "Justification by faith should be far more than it is the daily testimony of Protestant pulpits." A more modern day theologian, J.I. Packer, wrote, "For the doctrine of justification by faith is like an Atlas: it bears a world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of saving grace."⁶

This is an important doctrine: the heartbeat of the Protestant Reformation, is vital for our own walk with Christ, but has also been uniquely used of God to bring renewal to the church. John Piper: "History bears witness the preaching of this truth creates, reforms, and revives the church." JE's two sermons on Rom 4:5 (God justifies the ungodly) in Nov 1734 sparked the first Great Awakening. But I love this doctrine because I am intimately acquainted with my own sin and my desperate need of forgiveness.

I mentioned a couple weeks ago in Phil 1:11 that too many Christians base their justification (their standing with God) on their sanctification (their growth in grace). We often fall into this experientially, but Rome teaches this as doctrine. But according to Rome, S and J are the same thing. So for them, your standing with God is dependent on your holiness. You can lose your justification. Here is how Pope John Paul II defined justification in the catechism: "not only the remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inner man."

They teach that justification is a process and one that can be lost. Protestants do not. Protestants distinguish between justification and sanctification. Justification is a one-time declaration that we are right with God. Sanctification is the ongoing process of growing in conformity to Christ. J is declared R, S is being made R. J is a position before God, S is our practice. J is immediate, S is a process. J is objective, S is subjective.⁷ J is the basis of S.

Turn to the book of Galatians (914). Luther loved this book. He called it his Katie Von Bora. That was his wife's name. I agree. Galatians is my Alicia Anne White. I wrote two books on this book several years ago. I love it. Galatians and Romans talk about justification a lot. The noun (R) occurs 57 times and the verb occurs 27

⁴ *Legacy of Luther*, 126.

⁵ Piper, *Brothers*, 17; Luther: "The article of justification is of such a nature that it can never be exhausted by study."

⁶ J. I. Packer, "Introductory Essay," in the Banner of Truth edition of James Buchanan's *The Doctrine of Justification*, viii; J.I. Packer said justification is like an atlas: "It bears a whole world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of God the Saviour." Packer *Evange Influences* 189.

⁷ Mahaney, *Living* 118.

times.⁸ God wants you to know about it. So what does it mean? Simply put, justification means to be declared in the right. It is a lawcourt image. Think of the judge dropping the gavel: not guilty.

Justified: just as if I'd never sinned. Thomas Adams says, "Sins are so remitted as if they never had been committed." But not only that. We are not just left with a blank slate. God requires perfection, not just a blank slate. Just as if I'd never sinned and also "just as if I'd always obeyed." Two realities happen when we trust in Christ: our sins are forgiven, and we are counted R in Christ. Justification is the removal of guilt and the reckoning of R. R.C. Sproul says, "Justification refers to a legal action by God by which he declares a person just in his sight."⁹ Okay, got it? What is justification? To be declared righteous in Christ through faith. / Main point: you are justified by faith alone. **2:16** (This is the Word . . .):

I. We are *not* justified by works of the Law – This right standing with God that we so desperately need, we cannot attain. We can't get there. We fall short. We are sinners. God requires perfection. We are imperfect. The Christian view of mankind is a pessimistic one. We have a pessimistic anthropology due to the reality of sin. That's a good worldview question to ask non-Christian friends. What is your explanation for the evil in the world? Why in your view do people do wrong so often? Flip over to **Rom 3:9-20**. We are not justified by works of the law. None is righteous, no not one.

This point is an offensive one. It shows that we are helpless to save ourselves. We need something outside ourself. The world says that we have an outward problem and must come up with an inward solution. That is bad news. The truth is we have an inward problem but praise God we have an outward solution. We cannot come up with the solution ourselves. As JE said, "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary." We cannot be justified by works. The bar is too high and our performance too poor. George Whitefield said, "Works? Works? A man get to heaven by works? I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand!" That is why we sing, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

As we talk with non-Christians, this is an important part of the message. Much of the world thinks Christianity is just moralism. Just be good, do better. But the message of Christianity is that there are none good, and we can't be better on our own. Rom 4:4-5: "Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." We don't work for justification; we believe for justification. And God doesn't justify the godly. He justifies the ungodly. Jesus didn't come for the healthy. He came for the sick. We are not justified by works.

II. We *are* justified by faith in Jesus Christ – 16. Did you notice that the Apostle basically says the same thing three times in a row? Remember, this is a lawcourt metaphor. When we believe in Jesus, the divine Judge drops his gavel of justice and declares – once for all – not guilty. Reckoned as righteous. This would be unjust without Jesus. If a judge declared guilty criminals innocent, we would have him removed. But we have an innocent man, a substitute, One condemned in our place. The lawmaker became the law keeper and then died for lawbreakers. Rom 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." "No condemnation now I dread." Rom 10:3-4: "For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

Kids, do you understand this? You are a sinner, like me, and all of us. You need forgiveness. .

⁸ Moo, 473.

⁹ *Justified by Faith Alone* Sproul 15.

III. Why does this matter? 5 reasons:

1. Truth – God’s Word is clear about the matter and we want to believe what God’s Word teaches. Scripture Alone is our final authority. Someone is right and someone is wrong. Interestingly, historically, to be Catholic was to believe that Protestants are damned. Listen to the Council of Trent, that has not been rescinded. If a person is Catholic, they believe this: “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema. (Canon 9) / “If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema” (Canon 30).

2. Heart of the Gospel – 3:8-9. God takes adding to his gospel very seriously. **1:6-10.** Friends, adding anything to justification – whether it be circumcision like here in Galatia, or baptism like historic CoC doctrine, or good works like RCC is an eternally serious issue.

3. Foundation of Assurance – Assurance in many ways was at the heart of the Reformation. Assurance is a bad thing according to Rome. Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott writes, “The reason for the uncertainty of the state of grace lies in this, that without a special revelation nobody can with certainty of faith know whether or not he has fulfilled all the conditions which are necessary for achieving justification.”¹⁰ He is saying we cannot be assured. According to Rome, we never know where we stand with our Maker. Depends on the day, depends on us. Basing our assurance of salvation on us leads to anxiety and depression.

Think about it. Without justification by faith, every time you sin, you create a reason to doubt God’s acceptance of you. Where will you turn? To your own performance or to the cross of Christ where your debt was paid? Will you look inward to the self or outward to the cross? Luther: “When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made a satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where he is, there I shall be also.’” As the old hymn writer put it, “Well may the Accuser roar, of ills that I have done: I know them all, and thousands more: Jehovah knoweth none.”

Any good Father wants his children assured of his love. He wants us to lay our head down on the pillow after the worst of days, knowing that we are accepted by the Father because of the work of the Son. Listen to question 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563): “How are you right with God? A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God’s commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.” As Pastor Jack Miller used to say, Cheer Up! You are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope.

¹⁰ James White, 133.

4. Foundation of Joy – Justification by faith is the key to happiness. This is why I want you to get this right! There is a solid pastor named Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Back in 1965, he wrote a book called *Spiritual Depression*. Ch. 2 is called the true foundation and it is on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. And he says one of the main reasons Christians lack happiness is due to them not truly grasping this truth. He said that miserable Christians base their justification on their sanctification, meaning, that we think God’s love for us is dependent on how we are performing.

Makes you sing: Faith alone is the heart of the gospel. Which is why so many of the classic hymns are focused on this truth. “My hope is built on nothing less, Than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in Him be found, Clothed in His righteousness alone, Faultless to stand before the throne!”

“Jesus paid it all, All to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow. For nothing good have I, Whereby Thy grace to claim; I'll wash my garments white In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb. And now complete in Him, My robe, His righteousness, Close sheltered 'neath His side, I am divinely blest.”

“I will not boast in anything, No gifts, no power, no wisdom, But I will boast in Jesus Christ His death and resurrection. Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer. But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom”

“Nothing can for sin atone, Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Naught of good that I have done, Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my hope and peace, Nothing but the blood of Jesus; This is all my righteousness, Nothing but the blood of Jesus”

“No condemnation now I dread, Jesus, and all in Him, is mine, Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine.”

39 Articles: “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort.”

5. Fuel for Change – Justification by faith changes everything. It restructures our self-understanding and motives, our view of God and the world. True and lasting change comes from the gospel. Change that has not gospel fuel but is merely behavior management won't last. Paul Tripp gives an example of apple trees to show how the gospel fuels change like no other. I am not a great yardman. I wish I had the time to be! I worked for a landscaping company – Fabolous Exterior – all through HS and college, but not so much anymore. Now my boys do most of the work and I give them food in exchange for their work. Now, the main thing I am going for is avoiding complaints from the neighbors. We used to have rose bushes as our landscaping, which for about 6 days of the year look really nice. So let's say I get tired of the dead looking bush so I went to the florist and bought 5 dozen beautiful roses and taped them up on my dead rose bushes? It would look amazing. For a few days. Then the wilting would begin.

Just trying to change our behavior is like taping roses on a dead bush. The gospel of justification gets at the root and brings life. It is the fuel for true and lasting change.

This is why we keep preaching it, again and again. One more Luther quote: “The Gospel cannot be preached and heard enough, for it cannot be grasped well enough. We preach nothing new; but we are forever and

incessantly preaching about the man called Jesus Christ, true God and man, who died for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification. But although we are forever preaching and repeating this message, we shall never be able to grasp it sufficiently. In this respect we always remain babes and little children who are just learning to read and are hardly able to form half of a word, nay, scarcely a quarter of a word.”

Let me just mention three examples as we close: First, **criticism**: How many of us get all up in arms about being criticized? What is our first reaction to critical words? But when the gospel of free righteousness is your theme song, then you are much less defensive. When someone says something negative about you, you no longer react with defensiveness or devastation. You are actually freed to agree with your critic. “You proolly right and its probably worse than you even know. For I know One who suffered and made a satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

I am a sinner who deserves judgment, but God has granted me the gift of righteousness so I can agree and apologize if I have messed up and learn from it. We are freed from the slavery of man’s approval because we have God’s approval. You become free. You are free to fail because Jesus won. You are free to be a loser because Jesus is a winner. Free to be weak because Jesus is strong. Free to be sub-par because Jesus is superb. Free to not have it all together because Jesus does, and he is for you. Church, the need for self-justification has been nailed to the cross.

Second, **confession**. Because we are not justified by works but by faith, we can be free to confess our sin. We can be real, honest, open. We are sinners. Sinners saved by grace through faith so we can get our sin out in the light as we seek to grow in spiritual maturity. Micah 7:8-9: “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication.”

Third, **trials**: When trials come, we know that it is not God punishing us, because Jesus has borne the penalty we deserve and God no longer sees us as sinners but as righteous. **Rom 8.1**. When we stand on the solid rock, when the storms come we will not be shaken. We know God is for us. “When darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace.” Martin Luther said we should pray this way: “Send sickness, poverty, losses, crosses, persecution, what You will. You have forgiven me and my soul is glad!” **Gal 2:16**.