



MATT BLACK, Sun, Oct 15, 2017
Five Solas series

3 | Romans 3:21-26

SALVATION THROUGH FAITH ALONE

[We are] justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

ROMANS 3:24-25

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Faith alone. What does that mean? Faith means to trust. What are you trusting in for the salvation of your soul? Is it up to you or is it up to God? It cannot be both. Five hundred years ago, the same question was asked and it brought one of the greatest revivals in the history of the world. The question was, “How are we justified?” “How is a person made right with God and ready for heaven?” Do you know the answer to that question? The answer that Martin Luther gave turned the world upside down. He rediscovered the Bible doctrine that “a person is *justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone*. Do you believe that? Very few people 500 years ago understood the Gospel that clearly. They were not trusting in Christ alone, but in Christ plus the sacraments and penance and good works, and a whole load of other things. Martin Luther said this doctrine of faith alone is the “hinge on which the Gospel swings.” He was in agony of soul until he rediscovered this glorious truth in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Faith alone in Christ alone. So simple. But in his day, people were doing good works in order to gain heaven. They would even pay money, called indulgences, to spring souls from Purgatory (which is a made-up doctrine in itself).

JOHANN TETZEL: ANCIENT PROSPERITY PREACHER

Before Luther was saved, while he was touring Rome, he came across a man name Johann Tetzel at St. Peter’s cathedral which was still under construction. Tetzel was an ancient prosperity preacher. Johann Tetzel drew circus-like crowds and offered free-sin passes, called indulgences. For those who knew they wanted to sin, an indulgence would buy forgiveness for them ahead of time. Regardless of the cost, a “free pass” to sin was a good deal for those not wanting to navigate the hoopla of the church’s confessionals and sacraments. People at that time could also pay for their loved ones to get out of Purgatory. Listen to an actual sermon from Johan Tetzel. He would say:

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found...” Seek him on behalf of your father and mother. Do you not hear the voices of your dead parents and other people screaming and saying: ‘Have pity on me, have pity on me... We are suffering severe punishments and pain, from which you could rescue us with a few pennies, if only you would.’ Open your ears, because the father is calling to the son for release from Purgatory and the mother is calling to the daughter.”¹

And then, of course, his oft quoted word of assurance: “*As soon as the coin in the coffers rings, The soul from purgatory springs.*” Tetzel was raising money to build St. Peter’s Cathedral in the Vatican. Luther came back from that tour of Rome completely grieved and beside himself. He was not yet converted to Christ, but as teacher, professor and lecturer for the church, he would often put out points of theology to debate. On October 31, 1517, Luther, disgusted with indulgences nailed the 95 theses, or propositions to debate to the castle door at Wittenberg, Germany. Though Luther was still dead in his sins, several of his propositions had the ideas of the fives solas of the Gospel: We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the Glory of God alone, based on the authority of the Scriptures alone. Luther said if the pope had authority to grant

¹ Heiko A. Oberman (Author), Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (Translator). *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1989), 188.

forgiveness through indulgences, why didn't he grant them to every one without charge, 24 and 7?

LUTHER'S CONVERSION

Let me tell you about Luther's conversion. Luther continued to try to earn his salvation. One of the key verses that plagued him was Romans 1:17, "The righteous shall live by faith." He was reading it wrong his whole life. He was trying to be righteous through his own efforts in order to finally live by faith. Whenever Luther read Romans 1:17, his eyes were drawn not to the word faith, but to the word righteous. Who, after all, could "live by faith" but those who were already righteous? The text was clear on the matter: "the righteous shall live by faith." Luther remarked, "*I hated that word, 'the righteousness of God,' by which I had been taught according to the custom and use of all teachers ... [that] God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.*"² The young Luther could not live by faith because he was not righteous—and he knew it. All his teachers told him he had to be righteous before he could live by faith. It was all backwards. Meanwhile, he was ordered to become a professor at Wittenberg University. During his studies in the book of Romans in 1519, he began to see a way through his dilemma. Listen to his discovery: "*At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I ... began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith... Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open.*"³ Luther rediscovered what had been taught throughout the ages, that the righteousness we need to enter heaven is a righteousness outside of ourselves, obtained through faith alone. With that in mind, let's read where Paul explains in detail, what it means to be justified by faith alone in Romans 3:21-26. Would you stand for the reading of God's Word?

Scripture

"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" (Rom 3:21-26). *This is God's Word.*

We come to a beautiful realization, our first point. That salvation by faith was not invented in the ministry of Jesus or the apostle Paul. This Gospel of grace is ancient.

² Martin Luther. Wilhel Pauck, ed. *Lectures on Romans* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1961), xxxvii.

³ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works*, Vol 45 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1959), 360.

1. FAITH ALONE IS REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(3:21-22a)

Salvation by faith alone is not a brand-new novelty, unheard of in the Old Testament. This doctrine that is now crystal clear in the work of Jesus Christ, is the same way of salvation that God proclaimed to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to Jeremiah and to Isaiah. The just shall live by faith. Justification is by faith alone.⁴

THE OLD COVENANT WAS REDEPTIVE

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it” (3:21). “The Law and the Prophets [ANOTHER NAME FOR THE OT] bear witness to” God’s way of salvation by grace through faith. It’s never been by works or law keeping. God’s people have always been failures in that. God’s Old Testament people were given the **Law-Covenant** at Sinai. They were told “do this and live” (cf. Lk 10:28). Keep the Ten Commandments and live (**Deut 6:25**). after Moses gave them the Law-Covenant at Sinai, the people responded, “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Exo 24:3). Of course, as good as their intentions were, they were condemned before they finished that sentence. The truth is (according to Paul): “the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient” (1 Tim 1:9), of which we all are.

What is the Purpose of God’s Law Covenant?

The purpose of the Law is to show our need for Jesus Christ. “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24, KJV). Paul just finished saying this in Romans 3:20, “by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Sin burns in our conscience through the Law, so that we would cry out, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The law covenant throughout the Old Testament was always a covenant of grace and redemption. It wasn’t meant to justify the people by works. It was always meant to show them they could never be righteous in themselves. Whether it was with Adam and Eve, Abraham, Noah, Moses, or David, it was always a covenant that God would obtain salvation for those who trust in him. How do we know that the Old Covenant was redemptive? Whenever God came to reconcile with his people, whether it was Adam or Abraham or Moses, it was always with a sacrifice. With Adam and Eve, he killed animals to make clothes for them (Gen 3:21). Noah was also justified by faith by entering into the Ark when it had never rained. And when he landed on Mount Ararat, he built an altar and sacrificed some of the clean animals (Gen 8:20). With Abraham, God made a covenant of blood while Abraham was asleep, and God walked through the butchered animal alone, to demonstrate he alone as God was responsible for this covenant. And all Abraham had to do was “believe” and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Gen 15:9-21, esp. vs

⁴ R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 73.

12). We could speak of Moses who doused the people with blood at the base of Mount Sinai, demonstrating they would not be able to keep the covenant (Exo 24). Moses asked God to reveal himself, and God said, “I am a God of full of grace, plenteous in mercy and abounding in unrelenting love” (Exo 34:6). David wrote so many Psalms about the justified man who is forgiven of his sins. He said in Psalm 130:1, “If you, O LORD, should keep a record of our sins, who could stand?” In other words, our right standing before God is not based on our record, but the record of Someone else (Jesus). “King Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats. And so the king and all the people dedicated the Temple of God” (2 Chron 7:5). They were all made right before a holy God, not based on their own righteousness, but by a foreign righteousness outside of themselves. Paul said it this way, “[that I may] be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil 3:9). This is what Luther called, “an alien righteousness” – a foreign righteousness outside of myself. That’s exactly what Paul says in Philippians 3 and in Romans 3.

THE OLD & NEW COVENANTS POINT TO AN ALIEN RIGHTEOUSNESS

“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” (3:21-22a). Were any of the people of the Old or New Testament perfect outside of Jesus? No. Paul is talking about righteousness or justification. What does he mean? The “righteousness of God” means a right standing before God. We don’t have that. How do we get that right standing before God? We get it by faith. In Hebrews 11, the writer of Hebrews gives a whole list of those justified with a righteousness not their own. The Old Testament witnessed to a right standing with God that was obtained apart from trying to do good works. It taught that righteousness came by the merits of a coming Redeemer who justified people by faith. Paul in Romans constantly quotes verses throughout the Old Testament to show that salvation is a mercy and grace of God obtained through faith alone. “Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). “The righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4). Psalm 32:1, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Covered by what? By the blood of the coming Redeemer.

The Old Testament sacrifices impressed on the minds of God’s people that the Lord was to be approached only through a bloody sacrifice, and that forgiveness was received because of faith in the Lord. “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb. 9:22). All barriers to God are removed at the Cross, which demonstrates his righteous wrath against sin and yet also broadcasts his love for sinners. His redemption (as G. Campbell Morgan once said) is not “a pity that agrees to ignore sin; but a power that cancels it and sets free from its dominion.”⁵ In other words, the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the Old Testament) clearly sets forth that salvation is by grace, through faith. Adam was not saved trusting in himself. Noah never said, “I’ll save the world from this flood.” Moses never said, “trust in your own righteousness.” No what we do requires a sacrifice. It requires a payment. We need a Savior! We cannot save ourselves. God’s people were slaves in Egypt and God told them to kill a lamb and put its blood on the door posts.

⁵ G. Campbell Morgan. *Hosea: The Heart and Holiness of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 133.

Remember what the Lord said to them, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exo 12:13). Hallelujah what a Savior! Let me say secondly, that...

2. FAITH ALONE IS **REQUIRED** FOR JUSTIFICATION (3:22-24)

It seems too good to be true doesn't it? We are made right with God through faith. How can we be righteous if we are all sinners? How can it be? *It's a gift*. All people without distinction can be declared righteous before a holy God.

ALL MUST COME BY FAITH (3:22a, 24)

“The righteousness of God [is received] through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:22a, 24). You're going to want that justification on Judgment Day. That right standing with God is only available to those who trust in Christ. If you want justification, you must come by faith. Paul said in Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

What is Justification?

What is Justification? Justification means to be “declared righteous” before God now and at Judgment Day by virtue of the imputed merits of our crucified Savior, Jesus Christ.⁶ “He [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21, KJV). To be justified is to have a right standing with God based on the glorious exchange of your filth and sin for Jesus' righteousness. You can imagine on Judgment Day and God says to you, “Well done my good and faithful servant” (Mt 25:21). Stunned, you will be thinking, “well done?” I did my best but it wasn't much! But you be quiet on that day. Because Jesus with the nail prints in his hands will do all the talking.

What is Faith?

Faith means to trust. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). God has revealed to you “things not seen.” I was not there at Calvary to see Jesus crucified, but I trust with my whole heart, that he died for me. Jesus died for my sins. “When Luther announced this concept of faith alone in the sixteenth century, it provoked a cry of opposition that split the Christian church in two. Many people were afraid that what Luther was teaching was the idea that all one had to do was to have a casual, cavalier belief in Jesus, and could live any kind of life of wickedness they then desired. Such a doctrine would destroy earnest attempts at holiness and godliness among Christian people. So Luther was forced to ask the question, What is saving faith? He described saving faith as *fides viva*, a living faith, a vital faith, a faith that was beating with a heart pulsating after God.”⁷ Others went on to say “*Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone.*”

⁶ Johnson, S. Lewis. *Discovering Romans: Spiritual Revival for the Soul* (Nashville: Zondervan), 60. Cf. Deut. 25:1; 1 Kings 8:32; Isa. 5:23; Rom. 2:13; 3:4; 4:3-25; 5:17

⁷ R. C. Sproul, *The Gospel of God: An Exposition of Romans* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 74.

ALL WITHOUT DISTINCTION MAY COME BY FAITH (3:22b-24)

Paul goes further and says that since all are rebels and sinners against a holy God, all are a candidate to be justified by grace through faith in Christ. Look at **Romans 3:23**, “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” (3:22b-24). All may come. There are no ethnic or social or economic barriers. Come kings and presidents. Come little children. There is no distinction. Come old and young. Male and female. Come Asian, African, Latino, and Anglo. Come Indian, Pilipino, Arabian, and Jew. Come one and all to Christ! Come rich or poor. Come religious or non-religious. Come to Jesus. There is room at the Cross for you! One of the wonderful things about the last book of the Bible is that it pictures around the throne of God on the last day men and women from every language and family and nation. Millions of them! On that last day around the throne, there will be all kinds of people from everywhere—different colors, different senses of humor, different languages, different ethnicities. God draws out his people from all of those nations. Even today, if you travel, you will find Christians in amazing places. Around the throne on that last day people will be found from all over the globe because God has made available the righteousness that we so desperately need to all who believe because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

All Are Guilty, Wretched Sinners

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). All men are guilty before the judgment seat of God. We may think that we are more righteous than other people but compared to the ultimate standard of God, we fall short, abysmally short, miserably short.⁸ Since all have sinned and come short of God’s glory, justification must be freely given to us by grace or there can be no justification. Sinners by definition cannot save themselves. Saving yourself would be as effective as a heart patient doing open heart surgery on himself. It’s impossible. Sinners are damned unless God does something.

Only Sinners are Invited to Come

“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” (3:23-24). If you are a sinner, you qualify. Come to Christ with your sin. Come wounded and weary sinner. Come to Christ. He gives a right standing with God as a gift. A right standing with God is available to all people without distinction. All are welcomed to come to Jesus and receive a right standing with God through him. They must come through faith alone. Romans 3:22, “The righteousness of God [is available] through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” All who trust in Christ get a right standing with God. Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28-29).

⁸ Ibid., 76.

3. FAITH ALONE **RESTS** ON CHRIST ALONE (3:24-25)

The object of my faith and trust must be Christ, not myself or my church or anything else. In order to have God's righteousness, I must put my full trust in Jesus Christ. The means of appropriation of the benefits of the death of Christ is through faith and faith alone. Don't misunderstand. Faith is not a meritorious work that saves us. That's not what the apostle means by justification by faith. Rather faith is the instrument that links us to Christ. Perhaps a more accurate way to state the doctrine of justification by faith alone is to say: justification is by Christ alone. It is his righteousness that justifies us. It is his merit that provides a place for us in the kingdom of God. Faith links us to him, so that we participate in his righteousness in the sight of God. This righteousness is given to every person that trusts in Christ.⁹ So then we trust in Christ alone. If you trust in Christ plus your good works or Christ plus a good marriage, your good social standing, or that you are a good person, then you are doomed.

Luther: Christ, Not Myself

Luther put it this way in his lectures on Romans: "*The moment I ground grace in anything in myself, present in any measure through myself, no matter by what means produced, grace has forfeited the right to be called grace.*"¹⁰ Salvation is trusting in Christ *plus nothing*. Good works and a good marriage and doing good to others are fine, but they do not justify me. They are evidence that I am born again, but they do me no good in my standing before God. Christ alone justifies me. In Christ I am perfectly righteous in the sight of God because of his meritorious life and substitutionary death.

OUR REDEMPTION IS FREE FOR US (3:24)

We "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (3:24). We are justified by grace. Why do we even have an opportunity to be justified? It's a gift. It's grace. What is grace? Grace is God's unmerited favor freely given to us. Someone said grace is God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Amen! Grace is God's scandalous love. Grace is God's redeeming sacrifice. What does that mean? It means whether you've committed one sin or a thousand, you are deserving of hell. All equally need to be saved.

What is Redemption?

In the ancient world, redemption was mainly referring to the purchase of a slave from the slave market. For example, in the ancient world you could become a slave because there were no Western-style bankruptcy laws or credit cards. Supposing you borrow some money, the economy flounders, and your business goes belly-up. What do you do? In the ancient world what you have to do is sell yourself and/ or your family into slavery. That is what you do; there is no Chapter 11. The Bible uses this term to say that there was an exchange. Christ paid for your release from slavery to sin by his death on the cross. He paid for your hell.

⁹ Ibid, 74.

¹⁰ Martin Luther. *Luther's Works*, Vol 15 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1959), 252.

OUR REDEMPTION IS COSTLY FOR GOD (3:25)

Oh, how costly our redemption was for the Lord God Almighty. He gave his Son, his only Son Jesus Christ. We “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.” The righteousness (right standing) that God presented is Jesus’ work – called propitiation. In the Old Testament, the people put forward animal sacrifices. Lambs and cattle. All of that pointed to the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).

What is Propitiation?

“God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (3:25a). The object of our faith is the propitiation of Jesus Christ. Propitiation means to satisfy the righteous wrath and justice of God. The world goes back to the Tabernacle and the Temple. The word propitiate is literally “mercy seat.” The root of this word was commonly used in the Old Testament for that part of the furniture of the tabernacle where the blood was sprinkled in the Holy of Holies. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter into the Holy of Holies, behind the curtain. He would have a rope around him and bells on his fringes so they could hear him. He would go into with the blood of the lamb and pour it upon the mercy seat. So Christ is our mercy seat, our sacrifice of atonement. God is satisfied. Christ lifted up his voice and cried, “It is finished” and the curtain was torn in two from the top to the bottom. God did the tearing. You are forgiven child of God. Your sin debt is paid. God’s righteous wrath is satisfied. Hallelujah! Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. “The cross is our mercy seat.”¹¹

What about God’s Justice?

“This was to show God’s righteousness [justice], because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.” (3:25b). God “did this to demonstrate his justice,” not simply to love, forgive, or redeem us—but to demonstrate his justice. God could not just wink at sin. God is a God of holiness and righteousness. The price had to be paid, and it was, hallelujah!

What about Old Testament Saints?

“This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins” (3:25c). This refers to all the sins of God’s own covenant people in the past. They had often received temporal punishments of some sort or another. For example, under God’s justice the corrupt people of Israel did go into exile. But their sin was never dealt with on a divine level until Christ came.

4. FAITH ALONE REFLECTS GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS (3:26)

Christ’s costly death “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” (3:26). God presented

¹¹ Johnson, *Romans*, *ibid.*

Jesus as a propitiation in order to demonstrate that he is righteous even in declaring that sinful believers are righteous. He is “just and the justifier of the one who trusts in Jesus.”

GOD JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY

The Bible declares that God justifies the ungodly, not those who achieve some great spiritual status. God Paul says in chapter 4 of Romans: “to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Rom 4:5). You say, “How can I be justified and still a sinner? I don’t feel justified.” When Luther defined the doctrine of justification in the sixteenth century, he used a Latin phrase *simul justus et peccator*, which means ‘At the same time, just and sinner’. This gets to the heart of justification by faith alone. Though in and of myself I am a sinner, once I have received the benefit of Christ’s propitiation, I am just in the sight of God. Just, by virtue of Christ’s righteousness; sinner, by virtue of my own performance.¹² I am positionally righteous in Christ and progressing in sanctification (falling forward as Calvin put it). My everlasting soul is not resting in my works, but by faith in Christ’s work. Are we justified by works? Not by my work in any way. But yes, by Christ’s work. Praise God for the work of Christ on the cross! So God can allow you, a sinner, into heaven because of the divine exchange, the just for the unjust. Your sin for Christ’s riches. What an exchange. God’s justice is satisfied. God’s love is magnified. And Christ is glorified! He is “just and the justifier of the one who trusts in Jesus.”

Conclusion

In 1521 he was called to an assembly at Worms, Germany, to appear before Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor. Luther arrived prepared for another debate; he quickly discovered it was a trial at which he was asked to recant his views. Luther replied, “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with clear reasons based on the Scripture... then I cannot and will not recant. It is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience.” Then he added, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.” Luther stood by faith in Christ alone. If you are here today believing in Christ. Then celebrate! If you are trusting in anything else, throw yourself upon Christ’s work on the cross. Come to him by faith. Jesus said: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (Jn 5:24). Let us worship Christ for what he has done. We have done nothing, Christ has done everything. Look to him and be saved. Jesus said, “If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me” (Jn 12:32). My righteousness standing before God is through SOLA FIDE, faith alone in Jesus Christ!

SOLI DEO GLORIA

¹² Sproul. *Romans*, 77–78.