

“What it Means to be Reformed”; Session # 62, Sola Fide - “Descriptions of Justifying Faith”, Prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall for the Adult Sunday School Class on December 27th, 2015.

Read Acts 16: 25-34 – “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” “Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.” “And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.” “But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’” “Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.” “And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” “So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.” “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes.” “And immediately he and all his family were baptized.” “Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”

1. Faith is the Condition for justification:

You can see here in these verses that the basis of this man’s salvation was not His faith; the basis of His salvation was the work of Christ. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” But the condition of his being saved was his exercising faith in the word; the gospel concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

James P. Boyce says in his Systematic Theology - “It is evidently so reckoned, because by faith the sinner appropriates to himself the work of Christ, and becomes vitally united with him. Faith may, therefore, be regarded as the condition upon which justification is bestowed upon those to whom Christ is presented as a Savior, to be received and rested upon for salvation.

“Faith,” says Dr. Charles Hodge, “is the condition of justification. That is, so far as adults are concerned, God does not impute the righteousness of Christ to the sinner, until and unless he (through grace) receives and rests on Christ alone for salvation.” Sys. Theol. Vol. 3, p. 118.

Boyce says again: “It is a condition which has in it no merit in itself, but which only seizes upon merit in another.” “It is also an act of the sinner, to which he is graciously disposed and led by God himself through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

2. Faith is the instrument, or hand, that receives Christ.

John 1: 12 and 13 – “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John L. Dagg says: “Faith in Christ is necessary to salvation.” “We may believe many things that God has said in his Holy Word, without believing in Christ; and we may believe many truths concerning Christ, without possessing that faith in him which has the promise of eternal life. True faith receives Christ entire, as he is presented in the Gospel. If any part of his character, of

his offices, or of his doctrine, is unwelcome to the heart, true faith does not dwell there. A perfect knowledge of Christ is not necessary to true faith: otherwise true faith would be impossible: for the riches of Christ are unsearchable (Ephesian 3: 8), and his love passes knowledge (Ephesians 3:19). But the true believer delights in Christ, just so far as he has knowledge of Him; and desires to know more of him, that he may be more filled with his love. The revelation made to the Old Testament saints was obscure; but, so far as they could see Christ, in the light which was afforded them, they rejoiced to see his day and were glad (Joh. 8:56).”

4. Faith is always Active in Scripture.

R.L. Dabney says: “The Scriptures describe faith by almost every imaginable active figure. It is a “looking,” (Isaiah 14:22,) a “receiving,” (John 1: 12, 13,) an “eating” of Him, (John 6:54,) a “coming to Him,” (John 5: 40) an “embracing of Him,” (Hebrews 11: 13,) a “fleeing unto Him, and laying hold of Him,” (Hebrews 6: 18,) &c. Here it may be added, that every one of the illustrations of faith in Hebrews 11 (whose first verse some quote as against me) come up to the Apostle’s description in the 13th verse, containing an active element of trust and choice, as well as the mental one of belief. The manner in which faith and repentance are coupled together in Scripture plainly shows that, as faith is implicitly present in repentance, so repentance is implicitly in faith. But if so, this gives to faith an active character. Mark 1: 15; Matthew 21: 32; Titus 2: 25.

He says: Unbelief is a Sin.

“The Scriptures represent faith, not only as a privilege, but a duty, and unbelief as a sin. 1st John 3: 23; John 16: 9. Now, it seems clear that nothing is a sin, in which there is no voluntary element. The mere notion of the understanding arises upon the sight of evidence involuntary; and there is no moral desert or ill-desert about it, any more than in being hurt when hit. And the reason why we are responsible for our belief on moral subjects is, that there is always an active, or voluntary element, about such belief. The nature thereof is explained by what has been said above on the order of causation between our disposition or propensities, and our opinions concerning their objects.

He further says: “We define faith as a holy exercise of the soul; but we do not attribute its instrumentality to justify, to its holiness, but to the fact that it embraces Christ’s justifying righteousness. It is neither strange nor unreasonable, that a thing should have two or more attributes, and yet be adapted by one special attribute among them, to a given instrumentality. The diamond is transparent, but it is its hardness which fits it for cutting glass. True faith is obediential: it involves the will: it has moral quality: but its receptive nature is what fits it to be the organ of our justification. Hence it does not follow that we introduce justification by our own moral merit.”

“Faith does not justify in virtue of its rightness, but in virtue of its receptivity. Whatever right moral quality it has, has no relevancy whatever to be, of itself, a justifying righteousness; and is excluded from the justifying instrumentality of faith; 11: 6. But faith justifies by its instrumentality of laying hold of Christ’s righteousness, in which aspect it does not contribute, but receives, the moral merit.

Romans 4: 4, 5 – “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”

Romans 11: 6 – “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” “But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.”