

WEEK 4



Sola Fide

FAITH
ALONE



WEEK 4

SOLA FIDE FAITH ALONE

INTRODUCTION



PSALM 9:7-10

“The LORD reigns forever; He has established His throne for judgment. ⁸He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity. ⁹The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. ¹⁰Those who know Your name trust in You, for You, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek You.”

The meaning of faith was central to the Reformers as they sought to rediscover the gospel.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST gift you've ever received?

As I write this, I anticipate the birth of my son! My wife Sheila and I have been married for over 11 years, and early into our marriage doctors told us that we had a low likelihood of having biological children. And so, parenthood became a thing placed into the deep corners of our minds. But then, nine months ago, Sheila dropped this bombshell on me! When I found out that we were having a son, I knew exactly what sort of name I wanted to give him. From the name Matthew, we chose Matteo, which means a “gift from God.” I’ve yet to meet Matteo, yet I cry tears of joy over God’s special gift to us.¹

While the gift of Matteo is amazing, he isn’t the greatest gift I’ve ever been given. That gift would be the faith to receive God’s saving grace (Ephesians 2:8). And that’s because this faith alone is the instrument that God used to include me in His family.

In this week’s study we will focus on faith—the often used, but frequently misunderstood, word that’s so significant to one’s relationship with the Father. The meaning of faith was central to the Reformers as they sought to rediscover the gospel.

I grew up in the Lutheran church and the influence of Martin Luther’s teaching of “faith alone” has always been emphasized—along with related terms like grace, justification and righteousness. However, these words weren’t always explained to me. So while I knew they were good, I didn’t fully understand them.

I have found that my experience is common; one might know about certain theological words, but not have a strong understanding of what they mean. My goal for this week is to unpack the theological significance of biblical faith.

Theology is important. Paul encourages Christians to grow in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9–11). But we must not confuse our knowledge of theology with knowing God. In other words, my knowledge of theology isn’t what saves me—it’s Jesus’ blood and righteousness! Let us explore some deep theological concepts, but let us do so for the sake of knowing the God who justifies us (Romans 8:33). Let us study theology relationally.

*...We must not confuse
our knowledge of theology
with knowing God.*



“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

EPHESIANS 2:8–10

DEFINE *Sola Fide*

“SALVATION IS THE
WORK OF GOD ALONE
AND IS RECEIVED BY
FAITH ALONE.”

WHAT IS FAITH?

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

—HEBREWS 11:1

The word faith is used many ways: describing someone’s religion (He is of the Hindu faith), as a wish (Just have a little faith and wait and see), or as a systematic declaration of belief (In our statement of faith, we believe that there is one God in three persons).

While these descriptions of faith are totally valid, they don’t describe *biblical faith*—a faith that’s active and confident! In fact, the word *confidence* comes from the Latin words *con* (with) and *fide* (faith). Biblical faith is not trusting blindly, but trusting firmly, in a bold way, on the assurance we have in Jesus.

The Greek word for faith (*pistis*) is defined as: The state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted; trust, confidence, faith in the active sense—believing.² Faith is no mere wish or empty hope, and it’s not void of fact or reason. Faith is a confident trust based on God’s promise that He will keep His promises to redeem the world from sin and vindicate His people. And so, God’s people live by faith!

*“Faith is...
acknowledging the
truth of everything
that God has revealed
in His Word, trusting
in Him, and also
receiving and resting
in Him for salvation.”*

—THE NEW CITY CATECHISM³

What can you give the God who has everything?

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE OF FAITH

In every other religious system, pleasing god is based on what you can do through your own efforts. You do more good than bad, or do what you can on your own and then have god help you out in the end.⁴

But for Yahweh,⁵ which is the covenantal and personal name for God, faith is the identity marker of His people. Faith defines our relationship with God. God's people live by faith, worship by faith, please Him by faith, and come into communion with Him by faith. Here are a few examples of biblical faith.

Faith started in the Garden. God gave one command: *"You must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die"* (Genesis 2:17). But a chapter later the serpent (the Devil) deceived Adam and Eve, and told them: *"You will not certainly die. For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:4–5). Adam and Eve decided to *not* have faith/trust/believe God, and instead they had faith/trusted/believed in the serpent.⁶

In Genesis 15:6 we see how Abraham believed God. God reaffirms what He promised to do for Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12—to give this very old, childless couple more descendants than they could count and bless the world through them. And so Abraham, *"believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness."* Abraham was declared to be righteous based on his faith in what Yahweh had promised. As Paul points out in Romans 4:1–12, this righteousness wasn't a result of Abraham's good works, including getting circumcised, which happened later in Genesis 17, but faith.

One of the most popular chapters in the Bible on faith is Hebrews 11. It is often referred to as the "heroes of the faith chapter" because it lists a number of famous Old Testament icons who pleased God by faith alone. Faith isn't a New Testament concept, it's a biblical concept—from Genesis through Revelation.

SO WHY FAITH?

Faith is important to Yahweh because it can't be earned or generated by you, only exercised. In every other religious system, god owes you a reward because of your hard work. But the Bible reveals an infinite, all-loving, and all-powerful God, who isn't indebted to His creation, but freely gives grace. God's people humble themselves and serve Him through faith, because there's nothing we could possibly do to earn any credit with Him. What can you give the God who has everything? Your trust!

WHAT DOES FAITH DO?

Imagine that you live on the 20th floor of an apartment building. One night you wake up to a screaming fire alarm. The hallway is filled with smoke and you're trapped in your apartment, as your worst nightmare has come true! You run to your window only to see a blinding, flashing strobe of red and white lights, as a fleet of fire trucks surround the parking lot. After assuming that your life will end within minutes, you suddenly see a giant ladder rising to your floor, with a fireman reaching out to you. You nervously, but desperately, grab the arm of the fireman, climb onto the ladder, and are lowered to safety.

Now in this situation, what was the thing that saved you? It wasn't yourself, and it wasn't the ladder—the fireman saved you. However, the ladder was the important instrument that was used in the rescue. Faith doesn't save us, *God's grace does!* But faith is the crucial instrument that is used to exercise this grace. Remember this week's memory verse? *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith."* We are saved *by* grace, *through* faith.

Faith is the critical instrument that connects believers to the Father, through the Son. The faith of God's people isn't effective because we are good at having faith; it's effective because the object of the faith, Jesus, is trustworthy and true. Our faith in God is what facilitates our redemption.

NO FAITH: RIGHTEOUSNESS LOST

The term *righteousness* has to do with something being “right.” A simplified way of looking at this is, “righteousness is the way things ought to be.” Since God Himself is perfect—and is the standard by which we measure anything—then we can see how He is perfectly righteous in Himself. When Adam and Eve were created and put into the Garden, they were created perfect; they were the way humans ought to be—righteous!

However, after disobeying Yahweh and receiving the curse of death, something changed in Adam that everyone would inherit. As Paul writes in Romans 5:12, “*just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.*” When Adam sinned, humankind gave up being the way we ought to be; we no longer shared in God’s righteousness, and are now guilty of distorting God’s once perfect creation. We are guilty of rebellion.

So what happens to guilty people? They stand before the judge to face judgment. When Paul says, “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23), he is not only speaking to our moral corruption, but also the legal guilt that we have taken on by breaking God’s law. Left in this guilt, we stand before the perfect judge, God, and receive the punishment we are due—humanity is declared guilty!

FAITH + JUSTIFICATION = RIGHTEOUSNESS

In English, we don’t see a connection between the biblical words *righteousness* and *justification*. But in Greek these terms are based on the same root word: the noun righteousness (*dikaiosunē*), and the verb justification (*dikaioō*). A simple definition for righteousness is: “the way things ought to be,” and justification is: “the activity of declaring something to be right.”

After Paul explains how Adam’s one sin led to a loss of righteousness and condemnation for all people (Romans 5:12,18), he goes on to explain the good news that all people can be made right with God through Jesus’ one act of obedience. This gift of being declared right is by the grace of God, because it “brought justification” (Romans 5:15–16).

So, we’re not the way we ought to be (righteous), but need to be declared righteous. How does this happen? This is where faith comes in. Think back to the courtroom: you’re the guilty defendant, and God is the righteous judge. True *faith* in God brings immediate *justification*; you are declared to be *righteous*. The beauty of God is that He declares us to be righteous, even though we aren’t yet perfect.

The perfect judge, in the perfect court, has publically declared that He has given us His righteousness. We still have many flaws, but God doesn’t look at us as being guilty anymore; we’re seen the “way we ought to be!” Everyone who puts faith in God is immediately *declared to be the way they ought to be*.

“The sin of our first parents brought death to us all. Since Adam was our federal head, what he did counted for us, in him we’re all rebels and dead.”

—SHAI LINNE⁷

“Faith means... in every temptation to transfer sin, death, the curse, and all the evils that oppress us from ourselves to Christ, and, on the other hand, to transfer righteousness... from Him to us.”

—MARTIN LUTHER⁸

BY FAITH WE HAVE BEEN IMPUTED CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Imputation means exchanging, or a “transfer of benefit or harm from one individual to another.”⁹

In Romans 5:18–19 Paul writes: *“Just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”* Paul is teaching the positive and negative effects of imputation.

First let's take a look at the negative imputation in these verses: *“Just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people... For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.”* This is the imputation of sin and guilt from Adam to all people. Adam's guilt was transferred (imputed) to all people.

Then the positive imputation: *“So also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people... so also through the obedience*

of the one man the many will be made righteous.” The act of righteousness Paul is referring to is *“Christ dying for the ungodly... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”* (Romans 5:6–11). Christ's righteousness is transferred (imputed) to all people who have faith in God.

This event is known as the “great exchange,” as God's righteousness is exchanged for our guilt the moment we believe in Him. Biblical scholar Thomas Schreiner explains it like this:

“God made Jesus Christ who was free from all sin to be sin on our behalf... Jesus was counted as a sinner, even though He was sinless... (He) became a sacrifice of sin for our sake... the sin of human beings was placed on Jesus as a substitute for sinners, He took on himself the penalty we deserved. This is the great exchange.”¹⁰

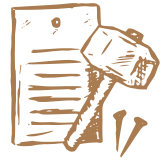
SOLA FIDE—FAITH ALONE

“Salvation is the work of God alone and is received by faith alone.”

We have Christ's righteousness by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, to God's glory alone!



DEMONSTRATE



ALL FAITH AND NO WORK MAKES CHRISTIANITY A DULL FAITH

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

—JAMES 2:14–17

In modern American culture we live in the ultimate age of *do it yourself* (DIY). When I need to fix something I’m one YouTube video away from conquering the task; saving money, and increasing stock in my “man-card.” However, the Bible teaches that we are unable to DIY our salvation, as all our “redemptive” good deeds are actually filthy rags to God (Isaiah 64:6). The biblical story is clear: there’s nothing we can do to help ourselves out of the mess we’ve created. We’ve fallen into quicksand, and the more we kick and grab, the more we sink into the abyss.

However, because we are completely saved by God’s grace, we are now granted the ability to do good works that actually please God. We don’t do good works to get into God’s kingdom; we do good works because we’ve been made citizens of His kingdom. Our faith makes us work.

Have you ever had a conversation with a Jehovah’s Witness or a Mormon and tried to show the beauty of God’s salvation through faith alone? If you have, you’ve probably been given the response “But what about James 2? Faith without works is dead!”

If we were honest, passages like James 2:24, and the topic of works, often make Evangelical-Protestants uncomfortable. The great Reformer, Martin Luther, even referred to the book of James as “an epistle of straw,” and questioned if it should be in the Bible (a position he’d later change).¹¹ So let’s look and see if James 2:24 contradicts what Paul writes in Romans, or if these passages are in harmony with each other.



WHAT DO WE DO WITH JAMES 2?

To understand James 2:24, “*A person is justified by works and not by faith alone*” (ESV), we must read the context, and see James’ point about faith and works.

In **1:25** James talks about the “perfect law,” which is probably a reference to Jesus’ teaching that the essence of the law is to love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:36–40).

Then in James **2:1–13**, he tells the story of a church that had two visitors. The first guest was rich, and the congregation was smitten with him, showing amazing hospitality. The second guest was extremely poor. He looked awful, probably stunk, and the congregation was embarrassed by him. The church members didn’t kick the second man out, but they pushed him to the back of the room, hoping he might eventually leave.

In **2:14–26** James goes on to explain that the only way we love others is to serve them as Jesus did, and to not think of ourselves as better

than them (Philippians 2:1–11). Therefore, Jesus’ followers should produce works consistent with their faith. These works are the evidence that we are God’s people—they are the fruit of our relationship with God. If Christians claim to believe the gospel, then they will live like it, because people who have been rescued from death will want to see others rescued also.

Christians have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and have been delivered into the kingdom of Jesus (Colossians 1:13–14), and should be passionate to serve as citizens of this kingdom. We don’t work to get into the kingdom; we work because we’ve been made citizens of this kingdom! James is helping Christians understand that the theological truths they believe ought to affect the way they live. Works matter because they are evidence of our profession of faith.

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” James 1:22

WHICH COMES FIRST, FAITH OR WORKS?

I just made eggs for breakfast and it got me thinking about that age-old question, “Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?” It’s supposed to be a mindbender, but I think it’s simple: the chicken!¹² An egg in itself won’t grow into a chicken without being fertilized. Eggs without fertilization are dead—they won’t ever cluck, but they’ll make a great omelet!

This is similar to faith and works. True faith is like a fertilized egg, it grows into a living, breathing thing. But dead faith has no life; it’s like an unfertilized egg. Just as a healthy diet will produce healthy physical changes in our bodies, a healthy faith will produce healthy works.

If someone claims to be a follower of Christ but their life bears no fruit, then their faith is dead and useless. One commentary on James says: “James is not arguing that works be ‘added’ to faith, but that one possess the right kind of faith, a ‘faith that works.’”¹³ Faith is shown to be genuine when it is brought to completion by our actions.¹⁴

A woodcut-style illustration in a monochromatic brown color. It depicts a man with a long white beard, wearing a turban and a long robe, kneeling on the ground. He is leaning over another person who is lying face down on the ground. The man's hands are near the person's head, suggesting a gesture of care or prayer. The background shows a wooded area with several trees and a path. The overall style is reminiscent of 19th-century religious illustrations.

**WE DON'T DO
GOOD WORKS TO
GET INTO GOD'S
KINGDOM; WE DO
GOOD WORKS
BECAUSE WE'VE
BEEN MADE
CITIZENS OF HIS
KINGDOM!**

SO WHY CAN'T JAMES AND PAUL BE FRIENDS?

So let's put this together. Paul (Romans 3:28) and James (2:24) both use the terms *faith* and *justified*. At first glance it might seem like a contradiction, but they're actually using the terms in different ways.

JAMES 2:24 <small>ESV</small>	A PERSON	IS JUSTIFIED	BY WORKS	AND NOT BY FAITH ALONE
ROMANS 3:28 <small>ESV</small>	A PERSON	IS JUSTIFIED	BY FAITH	APART FROM WORKS OF THE LAW

Remember, James was calling out people for claiming to be Christians when their actions hadn't justified what they proclaimed. So for James, *justification* was another way of *validating* your religious beliefs: when you do good works, you validate your faith claims.

In Romans, Paul is explaining how to become a Christian. After spending 3:1–23 showing that all people are sinners and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), he then explains how people are made right with God: "*A person is justified by faith apart from works of the law*" (Romans 3:28). There's nothing we can do to merit God's grace; it's a gift that He freely gives.

So James is talking about *validating your faith*, while Paul is talking about *getting right with God*. A look at a paraphrased version of these verses might be helpful.

James 2:24: A person's profession of faith is justified by the works they do in God's kingdom, and not by merely saying they believe in Jesus.

Romans 3:28: A person comes into relationship with God and is justified by faith alone, not by doing religious deeds of the law.

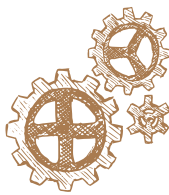
A clear description of how faith and works function is found in Ephesians 2:8–10. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*"

God saves us by faith, and includes us in His plan of redeeming His creation through the good works He's prepared for us. These works justify to the world that our faith is true, and that we are His children.

“The faith that saves leads to works, but works themselves aren't the ground of justification... they are evidence of the salvation that is ours.”

—THOMAS SCHREINER¹⁵

DIGEST



“Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

—I JOHN 5:5

IN ROMANS 1:17, Paul proclaims, *“In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”* The righteous *live* by faith! Faith is the extended hand of Jesus to those who have been called to be conformed to His image.¹⁶ Faith is the thing we have—the noun. However, when we turn that noun into a verb, we trust and believe. Righteous people are trusting, believing-in-God people. Righteous people live by faith, and are actively seeking to trust God.

FAITH ISN'T A ONE-TIME DEPOSIT, IT'S A DAILY TRANSACTION

Some people have a misconception of faith, like it's a financial investment. If I invest \$100 in Apple stock, I wait for the right time to sell. There might be a long period of time where I don't even remember having made the investment, because I don't yet need the payout. Then at some point, I will cash out and make a few bucks. While this is how financial investment works, it's not how faith works.

Faith isn't a one-time deposit. It's not saying a prayer at age 15, and then waiting to die to cash in on heaven. Through faith we are initially made right with God, but this faith creates a constant desire to trust God. When we have faith, we continually trust.

Faith is something you do. It's complete trust in another person, while in the process of being completely active and involved with that person.



GOD IS MY CO-PILOT?

Faith is a noun. It's something we possess. However, it's also something we do, and when we do it we call it trusting or believing. It's something that's practiced and lived out continuously in daily life.

Recently I was watching an interview with an actress promoting her new movie. There's a scene where she drives her car faster than 100 mph, oftentimes into oncoming traffic. She's not a professional driver, so they hired a Formula One driver and attached him to the roof of the car to shoot the scene (it was a crazy looking contraption that they developed). The actress was sitting in the regular driver's seat, moving the steering wheel, but she literally had zero control of the vehicle. The professional driver on the roof did all the driving.

Upon discovering this Hollywood secret, the interviewer made a profound statement: "Wow! You had zero control over the car, even when driving into incoming traffic. *That takes faith!*" The interviewer nailed what faith is. Faith is something you do. It's complete trust in another person while being completely active and involved with that person. This actress believed that the Formula One driver could safely drive at over 100 mph while navigating through intense and dangerous turns, risking injury and death. She actively trusted the driver with her life; by getting into the car, she exercised her faith.

The bumper sticker that announced, "God is my co-pilot," was really popular when I was a kid, and even inspired the mocking replica: "Dog is my co-pilot." But here's the thing, and I say this with respect to the well-meaning folks who have slapped the sticker on the ol' family clunker, the statement, "God is my co-pilot," is actually just as absurd as the mocking statement, "Dog is my co-pilot." Because God is no more your co-pilot than the dog is!

Yahweh is absolutely sovereign and is constantly active as the Lord of all creation. We read in Colossians 1:16–17 that by Jesus *"All things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."* Jesus created all things: the things you can see and the things you can't; He created all things for Himself. The way Paul writes verse 17, in the Greek, actually makes it very clear that Jesus is continually and actively holding all things together—even today.

Someone eventually realized that this co-pilot nonsense wasn't biblical, and created a better bumper sticker: "If God is your co-pilot, switch seats!"

The actress in the movie knew she wasn't the co-pilot of her car, she was a mere passenger—she was putting her complete faith in the professional sitting on the roof. We too need to have a strong understanding of God's position in the world, and realize that we diminish Him when we try to put Him in the co-pilot seat. God is not the co-pilot; He's the Pilot! He's the creator of the vehicle and the road it drives on. He created the molecules and the physics behind the combustion engine that produces the energy to move the vehicle from place to place.

*"If God is your co-pilot,
switch seats!"*

TRUSTING THROUGH DOUBT

A physical ailment is considered “chronic” once it’s lasted at least 12 weeks. Have you ever suffered from chronic doubt? I have, even recently. While folks sometimes have trust issues with God (His existence, the reliability of the Bible, the resurrection, etc.), I had different trust issues. I realized this one Sunday when I had no desire to sing in church—I couldn’t worship God because I didn’t trust Him.

During this season of doubt I was desperately seeking help, and came across Jerry Bridges’ book, *Trusting God*. This book has changed how I trust God. Bridges’ main point is: because God is completely sovereign, infinite in wisdom and perfect in love, then, “God in His love always wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His sovereignty He has the power to bring it about.”¹⁷ This perspective was

life-changing for me. I realized that if I actually believed these truths about God, my trust in Him needed to reflect it. My theology needed to be reflected in my ethics.

Since the Bible teaches these truths about God, then there’s no reason to doubt Him. As Bridges goes on to explain, when we don’t put our full trust in God, we “doubt His sovereignty and question His goodness. In both cases we cast aspersions upon His majesty and character.”¹⁸ Doubt is a real struggle, and oftentimes Christians try to minimize these thoughts and feelings. But ultimately, if we are struggling with doubt, we need to pray for God to help us adjust our view of Him and see Him for who He is—trustworthy.

The Christian life isn’t to be lived in isolation, but in a community of disciples where we grow

in our faith, explore our doubts and love others. If you struggle with doubts about God, the best thing you can do is process these doubts within your community. If you don’t have a community, find one. If you’re in a community that shuts you down when you bring up doubts, then find a new, healthy community.

Faith is the essential instrument that Yahweh uses to bring Himself into relationship with His creation. Faith isn’t a mere hope or wish, but a confident assurance that we can trust the promise-making God of Israel, and that what He has already accomplished in Jesus will one day come to a climax in the re-creation of the world. Therefore, God’s creation can trust Him in all aspects of life, on a daily basis, because He is trustworthy and true.

I realized that if I actually believed these truths about God, my trust in Him needed to reflect it.



We might feel discouraged at times because we struggle with trusting Him. We must always remain focused on the object of our faith—Jesus—and His trustworthiness. When I struggle, I find encouragement in the words from the hymn *Before the Throne of God Above*:

“When Satan tempts me to despair, And tells
me of the guilt within

Upward I look and see Him there, Who made
an end to all my sin

Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul
is counted free

For God the just is satisfied, To look on Him
and pardon me

To look on Him and pardon me”¹⁹

“WE HONOR GOD BY CHOOSING TO TRUST HIM

**WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND
WHAT HE IS DOING OR WHY HE
HAS ALLOWED SOME ADVERSE
CIRCUMSTANCE TO OCCUR.”**

—JERRY BRIDGES ²⁰

DISCOVER



“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

—PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7

ALL WE ARE SAYIN’ IS GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Romans 5:1 provides so much security and resolution to the problem of being separated from God: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Let’s look at the beauty of this verse.

Notice that the sentence starts with “therefore.” Paul uses this specific conjunction as a way to recall everything he’s said from chapters 1–4: All people, Jew and Gentile, are eternally flawed and cannot do anything to please God. However, being the promise-keeping God that He is, Yahweh will justify anyone who has faith in Him.

Second, pay attention to the tense of the verbs: *“since we **have been** justified”* Paul proclaims that those who have faith *have already been* declared righteous before God. This is a past tense action. It’s not something we hope might happen in the future, but is something that has happened already. The third observation is that this justification occurred *“through faith.”* Our faith is the instrument that God uses to declare us righteous.

And lastly, because we have been justified by faith alone, we now *have peace with God*. Peace! The Greek word for peace is *eirene*, but this concept comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*; a word that we’ve all heard, but probably haven’t fully explored.

SHALOM

Shalom is the truest sense of peace. It embodies completeness, safety, harmony, prosperity, welfare and health. Shalom is quietness, tranquility and contentment. It speaks of friendship and relationship. Shalom is a permanent, eternal peace. It’s the way things ought to be!

I’m currently a few weeks into fatherhood, which means I’m a few weeks without sleep. However, the other evening my wife took on all baby duties and let me sleep through the night. I crashed for 10 hours. It was glorious! While this provided a much-needed break and boost to my immune system, it was only temporary, as the following night I was back to watching episodes of “Shark Week” during 3:00AM feedings. While I had one night of peace, I didn’t have shalom. Temporary breaks aren’t shalom. True peace isn’t a mere ceasefire, but an eternal and absolute resolution where harmony and safety will forever exist.

Paul is declaring that those who have been justified by faith currently have shalom with God. We have shalom from the sin that separated humanity from God in the Garden, and the wrath that He has revealed against creation (Romans 1:18). If you have faith in Jesus, then you’ve exchanged wrath for shalom.

FAITH BRINGS SANCTIFICATION

After we have peace with God, we begin the process of sanctification. Sanctification means to be set apart or be made holy. It's the ongoing transformation that happens in our lives that doesn't cease until we have been completely conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). While salvation is a gift of God and is completely His doing, sanctification is a process where we cooperate with the Holy Spirit and trust Him to transform us in the areas that don't yet resemble Jesus.

When we receive Jesus' imputed righteousness and are declared to be righteous, we have a new status before God. However, we're still humans who are marred by sin, and continue to struggle with the evil that exists in the world, and within us. Through sanctification God transforms us, both internally in our thoughts and desires, and

outwardly in how we love others. This transformation happens because we've been given a new heart. The prophet Ezekiel describes how God's people will receive new hearts.

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws."

—EZEKIEL 36:25–27

I already mentioned that our son Matteo has come into the world. He has a new

Shalom is a permanent, eternal peace: It's the way things ought to be!

physical heart, one that grows stronger and matures each day. The same could be said about the new spiritual hearts that God gives us when we are justified by faith. Even though we've been legally declared righteous, we still struggle with our old self because we're in the life-long process of being transformed into the image of Christ. Through sanctification, our new spiritual heart will continue to grow and mature through the power of the Holy Spirit.

SANCTIFICATION THROUGH WORKS

When God sanctifies us, He often uses works as a way of transformation. Works, in a sense, are evidence of God's changing us because of the faith that we have been given. The great Reformer John Calvin has a brilliant illustration of this.

"It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone: just as it is the heat alone of the sun which warms the earth, and yet in the sun it is not alone, because it is constantly conjoined with light."²¹

The sun is like our faith, and the sun's rays of heat are like our works. These two are inseparable; if the sun exists, then its heat will explode out and warm everything in its reach! Christians aren't to be like the moon—an object that merely reflects light. No, we are to be like the sun, a giant ball of energy that actively casts its heat and brings life to the rest of God's creation; and we allow God to change us during this process.

The beauty of being saved by grace through faith is that it's not the power of my faith that saves me, but the power of God's faithfulness that does. We bring God glory through our faith, as well as through our works.

The great 18th century hymn writer Charles Wesley wrote a hymn that captures what Jesus did in bringing us into God's righteousness. May it be an encouragement to you as we allow God to sanctify us into the image of His Son.

And can it be that I should gain,
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be,
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?²²



SUGGESTED QUESTIONS



- 1 What's the most meaningful gift you've ever received? How did this gift impact you?
- 2 Do you struggle with faith? If so, do you know why? Are there obstacles or objections you have in trusting God?
- 3 Review the four major theological terms we discussed: Faith, Justification, Righteousness, and Imputation. Would you be able to explain or clarify them to someone else?
- 4 Do you struggle with wanting or needing to earn God's favor? Why or why not?
- 5 As a Christian, have you placed the proper emphasis on works, or have you made too little of them and lived with fruit-less faith?
- 6 How well do you understand James 2 and Romans 3? If you were to have a knock on your door this weekend and two Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormon missionaries were standing there, would you be able to have a meaningful conversation about faith and works?
- 7 What do you do when you hear the negative and condemning voice telling you that God doesn't want you? Do you listen to that voice? Do you know where to turn in God's Word to read about the assurance you have in Jesus?
- 8 How do you practice your faith in everyday life?
- 9 Do you have peace with God? Do you live like you have peace with God?

ENDNOTES

1. Matteo Vincenzo Souto Angelo was born on the Lord's Day, Sunday July 9, 2017, at 12:05AM. He's beautiful!
2. Danker, Frederick W. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
3. Keller, Timothy. *The New City Catechism Devotional: God's Truth for Our Hearts and Minds*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2017, p.133.
4. This is the LDS (Mormon) view of salvation (2 Nephi 25:23: "It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do").
5. The name Yahweh comes from the Hebrew name YHWH , found in Exodus 3:14–15, where Moses asks God His name. It's often translated into English as "Jehovah," but Yahweh is the better translation. This is the covenantal name that God has revealed Himself by to His people. The name comes from the imperfect form of the Hebrew verb "to be." This is why it's often translated as the "I AM," meaning, "I was what I was, I am what I am, I will be what I will be." God is completely indefinable, and is outside of human comprehension.
6. Even though the word "faith/trust/believe" isn't used in the Garden story, most biblical scholars believe that this is what is being referred to.
7. Linne, Shai. *Regeneration*, Lyrical Theology, Pt. 1: Theology, 2103. (Used by permission from the artist).
8. Luther, Martin. *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535. Vol. 27 of Luther's Works. Ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia, 1964, p.292.
9. Grenz, Stanley J. *IVP Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Downers Grove: IVP, 1999, p.65.
10. Schreiner, Thomas. *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification*, Zondervan, 2015, p.187.
11. The "epistle of straw" comment appeared in Luther's 1522 "Preface to the New Testament," but he eliminated it from all later editions.
12. There are actually a number of different perspectives about the "chicken and the egg." The ancient philosopher Aristotle struggled with this concept, and decided that both the bird and the egg must be eternal. However, modern scientists that hold to a Darwinian understanding of the origins of life tend to believe that the egg came first (although, it was a "fertilized egg laid by a bird that wasn't a chicken"). For purposes of my illustration, we can safely say that the chicken comes first; being that Christians are already mocked for believing in a God who was raised from the dead, we can also let the "chicken-egg-laying non-chicken bird" believing evolutionists laugh at our absurdity here too!
13. Moo, Douglas. *The Letter of James*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.144.
14. Schreiner, Thomas. *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, p.193.
15. Ibid, p.79.
16. The phrase "Faith is the extended hand of Jesus" is a quote from Greg Koukl, during a panel discussion on the White Horse Inn podcast: "Is Faith A Blind Leap?" July 8, 2017.
17. Bridges, Jerry. *Trusting God*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016, p.7.
18. Ibid, p.6.
19. Bancroft, Charitie Lees. *Before the Throne Of God Above*, 1863, Public Domain.
20. Bridges, Jerry. *31 Days Toward Trusting God*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2013, p.28.
21. Calvin, John. *Tracts, vol. 3, Containing "Antidote to the Council of Trent"*, Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851, p.152.
22. Wesley, Charles. *And Can It Be, That I Should Gain?*, 1738, Public Doman.

NOTES/ PRAYER REQUESTS

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the sun, a giant
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