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## *Justified by Faith Alone*

*October 29, 2023*

**Sermon Text:** Galatians 1:6-10

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 4

Today is Reformation Sunday upon which we remember the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the Reformers whom God raised up to restore the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who had been blinded by the wicked doctrines of Rome. The Reformers, like John Calvin, Martin Luther, and so many others suffered much for preaching *sola scriptura, sola gratia, solus Christus, sola fide, and all for soli deo gloria*. They did not coin these 5 solas, but the solas do accurately

summarize the faith they preached and which the Scriptures set forth -

- Scripture alone – not Rome’s traditions which so often made void God’s Word.
- Grace alone – salvation is the undeserved, unearned, unmerited favor of God
- Christ alone – true righteousness and justification before God comes from the atoning work of Jesus Christ alone
- Faith alone – not faith plus works, as Rome insists
- Glory to God alone – there is no room for man’s boasting in the true gospel means by which God justifies sinners.

As we heard R.C. Sproul teach this morning already in our first session, the doctrine of *justification by faith alone was at the heart core*

*of the Reformation.* Which is really to say, *the true gospel was at stake.* How weighty was this conflict? Well, the Apostle Paul writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit answers that question:

Gal 1:6-10 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— (7) not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

(8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

(10) For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

If the message preached is *pleasing to man*, you can be assured that it is a false gospel. If a preacher (anyone who claims to be presenting the gospel of Christ to others) is as a result “approved” by man, the message is not the gospel of Christ. Why? Because the sinner insists upon taking the glory belonging to God alone for himself. He insists that he merits, at least in part, God’s approval and justification. The true gospel denies the sinner all of this. Paul would preach nothing else:

*“For I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”*

In his preface to his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther wrote:

“I consider the infinite and horrible profanation and abomination that has always raged in the church of God, and still today continues to rage against this one sure foundation, our justification (that is to say, that it is not by ourselves, nor by our works, which are less than ourselves, but by Jesus Christ,

the Son of God, that we are redeemed from sin, death, the devil, and are made to share eternal life), I am compelled to throw away all shame and to be bold above measure.

In paradise, Satan shook this rock of faith when he persuaded our first ancestors that they could be like God by their own wisdom and power, abandoning true faith in God, who had given them life and promised to continue it. Then, after awhile, this liar and murderer, true to form, stirred up brother to murder brother for no other reason than that his godly brother had offered by faith a more excellent sacrifice, while Cain offered up his own works without faith.

There followed in biblical history a most intolerable persecution of Satan against this faith by Cain's descendants, until God had to purge the world by means of the flood, defending Noah, the preacher of righteousness.

After this the whole world grew mad against this faith, inventing an infinite number of idols and strange

religions by which people went their own way, trusting in works to please gods and goddesses without Christ's help and seeking by their own works to redeem themselves from evils and sins.

But these are nothing compared with Israel, the people of God, who not only had the sure promise of the patriarchs and afterwards the law given to them by God Himself through His angels, but also had the constant witness of the prophets' words, miracles, and examples. Even so, Satan so dominated them (and their outrageous opinion they had of their own righteousness) that they later killed all the prophets, and even Christ Himself, the Son of God, their promised Messiah. *And the reason was that these prophets had taught that people are accepted into God's favor by grace alone, and not by their own righteousness.* The devil and the world have always taught that we do not want to appear to do evil, but that whatever we do, God must allow it and all His prophets must consent to it or die. Abel shall die and Cain shall flourish.

I am content to allow this too-lengthy commentary to be published in order to stir up all the brothers in Christ against the sleights and malice of Satan, which these days are turned into such madness against the wholesome knowledge of Christ revealed and risen.

Satan does not rage against the lives and opinions of whomongers, thieves, murderers, perjurers, rebels against God and unbelievers. Rather he gives them peace and quietness; and gives them everything they want. In the same way, in the early days of the church, he permitted all the idolatries and false religions of the whole world to be quiet and untouched and he maintained, defended, and nourished them. *It was only the church and religion of Christ that he attacked on every side.*

Paul (here in Galatians) sets about establishing the doctrine of faith, grace, forgiveness of sins, or *Christian righteousness*. His purpose is that we may understand exactly the nature of Christian

righteousness and its difference from all other kinds of righteousness, for there are various sorts of righteousness.

There is a political or civil righteousness, which emperors, philosophers, and lawyers deal with.

There is also a ceremonial righteousness, which human traditions teach (concerning manners and certain observations concerning this life, but do not attribute to it any power to satisfy for sin).

Besides this there is another righteousness, called the righteousness of the Law or the 10 Commandments, which Moses teaches.

Yet there is another righteousness which is above all these – namely, the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, which we must carefully distinguish from the other sorts, for they are quite contrary to this righteousness because they flow out of the laws of rulers, or from the traditions of

the church, and also because they consist in our works and are to be performed by us in our natural strength.

But this most excellent righteousness – that of faith, I mean – which God imputes to us through Christ, without works – is neither political, nor ceremonial, nor is it the righteousness of God’s law, nor does it consist in works. It is quite the opposite; that is to say, it is *passive* whereas the others are *active*. WE do nothing in this matter; we give nothing to God, but simply receive and allow Someone else to work in us – that is, God.

This is a righteousness hidden in a mystery that the world does not know. Even Christians themselves do not thoroughly understand it and can hardly grasp it in their times of temptation. Therefore *it must be diligently taught and continually practiced*. [Galatians, Luther: The Crossway Classic Commentaries, McGrath/Packer, editors

You see then that it is not surprising, though Paul marveled

in astonishment at it, that Satan’s emissaries followed on his heels in the churches of Galatia in order to shake and trouble these new believers by shaking them off the foundation of Sola fide.

***This is a fact that we all must firmly grasp. Satan from the very first day has never ceased to war against this gospel of Christ, to confuse and clutter this true righteousness which is by faith alone. We must not be so foolish as to be blind to this and assume that all that claims to be “Christian” really is. We must not stop up our ears when we hear that most of that which presents itself as the church of Christ is a counterfeit. God’s Word warns us of this attack on the gospel from Genesis chapter 1 right on through Revelation 22.***

In addition, let’s hear from Luther one more time now as he shows us that we, even we who are in Christ, will certainly be robbed of our peace if we rely upon our works even in the smallest amount:

“But human weakness and misery is so great that in the terrors of conscience and danger of death we see nothing but our works, our unworthiness, and the Law. And when we are shown (ie, reminded of) our sin, in time we remember the evil of our past life. *Then the poor sinner groans with great anguish of spirit and thinks, ‘Alas, what a dreadful life I have lived! Would to God I might live longer, then I would amend my life.’*

Thus human reason cannot restrain itself from the sight of this active or *working* righteousness (ie, by works) that is, our own righteousness, nor can it look up to see the passive or Christian righteousness, but relies altogether on works righteousness, so deeply is this evil rooted in our flesh.

And then, on the other hand, Satan abuses this natural weakness in us and increases and aggravates these thoughts of ours (ie, he accuses). Then our poor conscience becomes more troubled, terrified, and confounded (and ashamed), for it is impossible for the human mind to

conceive of any comfort, or to look only to grace in the feeling and horror of sin, or to constantly reject all argument and reasoning about words. For this is far above human strength and ability, and indeed above the law of God as well. The Law is excellent, *but it is not able to quiet a troubled conscience but makes our terrors worse and drives us to desperation.*

Therefore the troubled conscience has no remedy against desperation and eternal death unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by grace, freely offered in Christ Jesus – that is to say, this Christian righteousness. If the conscience can take hold of this, then it may be at rest and boldly say, ‘I do not seek this active or working righteousness, although I know that I ought to have it, and also to fulfill it. But if I had it and did (could) actually fulfill it, I still could not place my trust in it. Thus I must abandon all active righteousness both of my own and of God’s Law, and embrace ONLY that passive righteousness that is the righteousness of Christ in grace, mercy, and forgiveness of sins. I

rest only on the righteousness that is the righteousness of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.’

Just as the earth does not generate rain and cannot itself work to produce it, but receives it by the mere gift of God from above, so this heavenly righteousness is given us by God without our working for or deserving it. We shall never be able to attain it unless God himself bestows it on us, imputing it to us by His gift beyond words.” [Ibid]

In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans (as well as in this letter to the Galatians (see Gal 3), Paul goes to lengths to show us that justification (that is, being declared righteous in God’s court) is by faith alone, *and always has been by faith alone even from the earliest days as recorded in Genesis*. Let’s look again at what we read earlier:

Rom 4:1-5 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to

boast about, but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (4) Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. (5) And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

In the New Testament, we are repeatedly reminded that the gospel is *Promise*. Not law, but Promise. Abraham believed in the Promise and he was counted righteous (justified) by means of faith alone in God’s Promise. Promise depends upon God alone, not upon man’s works. The Law of God, which is good and righteous and holy, *points us to our need of the Promise, which is really another name for the gospel*. God promised Abraham a Seed through which the Law’s demands would be perfectly met and a righteousness made for all who believe. All of God’s doing. Here it is in Galatians 3 -

Gal 3:17-29 This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make **the promise** void. (18) For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; **but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.**

(19) Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until **the offspring** should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. (20) Now an intermediary implies more than one, **but God is one.** (21) Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.

(22) But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, **so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.** (23) Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

(24) So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

(25) But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, (26) for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, **heirs according to promise.**

As we have just heard Martin Luther remind us, Satan has always been and is always working *to deceive us away from the righteousness of Christ which comes to us by faith alone.* This was his intent in Eden, it was his motive in moving Cain to kill Abel, it was why Noah and his family were persecuted by the world and on and on the battle rages – even to this day.



And we need to be very much aware and wise to the fact that *Satan in incredibly deceitful in his attacks*. For example:

Gal 2:11-13 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (12) For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. (13) And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that **even Barnabas was led astray** by their hypocrisy.

Let's put this question to ourselves:

*If the Apostle Peter and even Barnabas who was the immediate associate of Paul, and if millions and even perhaps billions of professing Christians have been deceived and led astray by Satan's false gospel, do we think that we could never be in such a danger? Are the Reformers' harsh words for the Pope and Rome offensive to us when the Apostle Paul*

*Himself pronounces these minions of the devil to be anathema – that is, damned by God? Are the Reformers' harsh words improperly so when in fact the Lord Jesus Himself told the Pharisees that they were children of Satan?*

Do we understand that the day now is and is moving rapidly to the time when the Antichrist, that lawless one, the little boastful horn of Daniel 7, will come to worldwide power and the entire world will be deceived by him? That he is at work right now? –

1Jn 2:18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

1Jn 4:3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. **This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.**

This is the very thing John tells us in Revelation –

Rev 13:1-8 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. (2) And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. (3) One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. (4) **And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"**

(5) And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. (6) It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. (7) Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. **And authority was**

**given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, (8) and all who dwell on earth will worship it,** everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

At the core heart of this Satanic religion is this hatred and denial of *justification by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone*. This is the fundamental explanation for the existence of the Roman Catholic "church" and all of its earthly glory and popularity. It is the Antichrist at work, and this is why God raised up the Reformers, why He enabled the Greek New Testament to be made once more available and why it began to be translated by men like Wycliffe and Luther and William Tyndale. It is why Satan has done all he can to destroy the Bible off the face of the earth and failing at this, why he works in the churches and denominations to stamp out the doctrine of the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

I have met Antichrist and probably most of you, though you may not have realized it. His most common representatives that I have met have been so called ministers in local churches. How do I know what they are? Because they teach that the Bible is not the inerrant Word of God. They mimic the serpent's words – *“Indeed, has God said....?”*

And there are others who will profess to hold to the Bible being the Word of God (Rome does, by the way, so did the Pharisees), and yet they will insist that the sinner still retains within himself at least a remnant of spiritual ability and freedom of will. Faith, they insist, is something the sinner exercises out of his own ability and choice. And with increasing frequency (it is already very widespread in the churches today) the message being preached overtly or covertly is that we need not fear hell, that God loves everyone equally, and that He sees good in everyone.

What is the truth? All who embrace these lies will have this experience

on the Day when they stand before Him:

Mat 7:22-23 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ (23) And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

May the Lord open our eyes to see and believe the Promise which Abraham believed –

*sola scriptura, sola gratia, solus Christus, sola fide, and all for soli deo gloria.*