

1 Peter 1:3-12 *6-9
Faith Alone

The most important question of your entire life is, *How can I be made right with God?* Think about that question for just a moment. There are many presuppositions that undergird that question. First, there is an acknowledgment of God and that your desire is to be in right relationship with him. Second, a person who dares ask such a question acknowledges that they are not right with God. So, after all of those presuppositions have been covered, then we can come to the question., *How can I be made right with God?* What is the answer?

The answer was the spark that led to the protest that we are celebrating – the Protestant Reformation (Celebrating a protest?). We are coming up on the 500th anniversary of Reformation led by Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wycliffe, Tyndale, Zwingli and so many others, and are discovering that what they sought to reform was the answer to the question that I have proposed to you today – *How can I be made right with God?* What is the answer? But more important where did they find the answer? They went back and wanted to know what Genesis, Matthew, Romans, said to answer that question.

Are we made right with God through sacrament (Baptism, Lord's Supper, Church Membership), through good work (Love, Neighborliness, Charity), through devotion (Reading Bible, Praying, Witnessing) or something else? The answer that Scripture gives is simple – *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved* – Faith alone. We are made right, justified before God by faith alone.

Faith alone means that a right standing with God (justification) does not come as a result of one's own righteousness but from a righteousness freely given to us by Christ.

Remember our definition of the 5 Solas:

Salvation (our only hope in life and death), according to Scripture, is through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, to God's glory alone.

Now go back to our definition of the Fourth Sola. In it you can hear everything that has come before - Christ, Grace and now we are considering Faith; all grounded in Scripture, all leading to God's glory. All to give us a picture of the gospel of grace. All to answer the question of salvation. Can you think of a question of more importance than the question of eternity? I hope that we are discovering that our defining the gospel is very personal. The gospel doesn't simply impact one thing as it does all things.

There was a pastor in the 1600's named Frances Turretin. He said something that helps us see why *Faith Alone* matters. He said,

But when we rise to the heavenly tribunal and place before our eyes that supreme Judge ... by whose brightness the stars are darkened, at whose strength the mountains melt; by whose anger the earth is shaken; whose justice not even the angels are equal to bear; who does not make the guilty innocent; whose vengeance when once kindled penetrates even the lowest depths of hell ... then in an instant the vain confidence of men perishes and falls and conscience is compelled ... to confess that it has nothing upon which it can rely before God. And so it cries out with David, "Lord if thou marked iniquity, who can stand?" ... When the mind is thoroughly terrified with the consciousness of sin and a sense of God's wrath, what is that thing on account of which he may be acquitted before God and be reckoned a righteous person? ... Is it a righteousness inhering in us and inchoate holiness or the righteousness and obedience of Christ alone imputed to us?¹

In other words, one day you are going to stand before the judgment seat of God. What hope do you have on that day? The answer – FAITH ALONE.

Faith alone is an important and misunderstood doctrine. What do we mean when we say that we are justified by faith alone? Remember the Protestant Reformation sought to take the Church back to the Bible. The 5 Solas are not imposed upon the text but truths that arise from the text. For example. A key text for Faith Alone is the first verse of Romans 5:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

How are we justified? By faith! What do we mean when we say faith? Because we are committed to the authority of Scripture at Oxford I want to show you how the truths of the reformation rise from the text.

Turn with me to 1 Peter 1. We read this passage last week, and will be in it again next week. The reason I am showing you this text is to show you the reason that these 5 Solas are dear to us. They are the right interpretation of the gospel of grace. These truths are expounded, drawn from, Scripture.

1 Peter is written to a group of people that he calls *elect exiles*, believers who are not at home in the world. I wonder if this is the way that we understand our stay on the earth – strangers and sojourners who are looking for a city whose builder is God. We are faith filled people who are right now trusting and longing for more. Does this describe you? Are you a man or woman of faith? But what is the substance of your faith and what kind of faith is it that pleases God? Let's read the text. Even though we are going to focus today on 6-9 I want to read 3-12 because it represents one thought for Peter. In the original it is one long sentence.

READ TEXT

¹ Turretin in Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification*, 16, 2015.

From 1 Peter, I want us to learn this wonderful truth of *Faith Alone* and to do so I want us to define faith. If it is faith alone, then we best make sure that the faith that we have is of the right substance.

1. The Source of Faith is God

Look at verse 3 and where we begin. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!* And then what, pay attention, *According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again.* How are you born again? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. How do you believe? God causes you to believe.

Do you see what Peter is doing? Peter is grounding our faith in something external to ourselves. This is important for anyone who has ever had doubt. This is important for anyone who has ever had moments of unbelief that results in us making bad choices to sin. The source of our faith is the unchanging God. What is faith? Feelings? We hope not. Sometimes I feel terrible, sometimes I feel great, sometimes I am excited about Jesus, other times I have to force myself to be excited. When I have those fleeting temporary moments where my faith is waning have I lost my salvation? No! Why? *If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.* (2 Timothy 2:13) Don't trust your feelings, have faith in God.

The point of justification by faith, the point of *Faith Alone* is the goodness of the gospel of grace. God has sought you, bought you, made you his very own. Why? He chose to! Me? Why would God choose to love a sinner like me? I have no idea, but aren't you glad that he does? There are two truths of the gospel that at once are infinitely true. Tim Keller said it this way. "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."²

Look at verse 6. This verse cannot be understood apart from 3-5. What is the *In this* of verse 6, what are we rejoicing in? Look at verse 5. We are rejoicing in the fact that God is guarding us by his power for salvation. How is he guarding us? *Through faith.* What does this mean?

It doesn't mean that he shields us from trouble and trials. Often trials are used by God to grow our faith. God is the one who can take a trial and turn it into a testimony. Sometimes our trials are blessings in disguise. But he guards us by his power even in the midst of trials. Why does he guard us by his power? So that we won't fall away. So that the difficulty that rocks our faith will not dismantle our faith.

Have you ever heard the phrase "God will not put more on you than you can handle?" Well that's only partly right. That idea is not meant to make you think that God is passively throwing things at us. He is actively guarding us and enabling us to trust in Him. If you don't have God you can't handle it, but with God all things are possible.

² Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*. Also, Article IV, *Theological Vision for Ministry*, The Gospel Coalition.

Remember Peter. Peter was the one who had a faith failure. Jesus was facing the cross, telling the disciples he was going to die, and Peter said, “over my dead body.” Jesus looked at Peter and said, “Before the rooster crows you will have already had denied that you know me three times.” But that’s not all the story. Let me read the story for you in Luke 22.

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (31-34)

Look at how the conversation starts. Jesus said, “Satan demands to sift you, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” Did Peter’s faith fail? No. Then look, Jesus says, “When you return, strengthen your brothers.” Did he strengthen his brothers? Is there such book called 1 and 2 Peter?

God’s power protects us from unbelief, which is the source of all sin. We must respond to his power. Understand, our faith is a response to His power. His power causes us to continue in faith. His power sustains our faith. Understanding this causes you to have confidence in God and not self, which is the whole point of *Faith Alone*. It’s not so much us holding onto him as it is he holding onto us. The knowledge that he has us in the palm of his hand and will never let us go causes us to cling tighter to Jesus.

And we need this confidence because this world is filled with things that seek to make our faith fail. One of the major occasions for a failure of faith is trials and tribulations. But, trials and tribulations for the faithful have the opposite purpose – what men may intend for evil, God can intend for good. The good of trials is the strengthening of our faith. This leads us to the second truth that we must learn about faith alone:

2. Faith in God Continues

Look at the Bible, verse 7. Faith that is not tested is faith that has no substance. The testing of faith provides an opportunity to display what it is you believe. I know, we all wish it were another way, but it isn’t. This faith that we are called to is not a one-time thing, it’s not a come to church on Sunday and live like the world on Monday kind of faith, it’s not even a pray a prayer and see no difference in your life afterwards, that faith is no faith at all, it is make-believe, pretend. But the kind of faith that walks through a trial and says, even though he slay me still I will trust him, that’s faith. The kind of faith that says I’d rather have Jesus than riches untold, I’d rather have Jesus than anything, that’s faith.

The kind of faith that God calls us to is not passive but persevering. What does it mean to persevere? It means even though everything around you tell you to quit, you keep going. An old Japanese proverb says, “Fall down seven times, get up eight.” – That’s perseverance. This faith

that God is calling us to is not autonomous, but is a faith that we must exercise. James says, “Don’t just talk about how full of faith you are, show your faith.”

The whole life of the believer is a life of faith, a life of trusting in what God says. The opinions of the Christian are increasingly becoming unpopular. Just consider the source. We live in a society, as Owen Strachan pointed out, that “Eulogizes Hugh Hefner, enables Harvey Weinstein, and eviscerates Mike Pence” for his following of the Billy Graham rule.³ Christians are those peculiar people who have a particular confession. Why do we have opinions about the rights of the unborn, the definition of marriage, certain behaviors that we understand to be immoral and a host of others? We are people of faith who trust God.

This trust is not just with our lips, or with our minds, but with every part of us. This kind of faith that God calls us to is genuine faith. Look at verse 7 again – *tested genuineness*. Suffering is a way that our faith is tested. Suffering is a major theme of the Bible. Through suffering God prepares for us an eternal weight of glory. These present sufferings are nothing compared to what awaits the faithful. Listen, your faith will be tested, it may be necessary for you to encounter various trials so that we can have an eternal perspective. Some say that Christianity is a faith for the weak. Karl Marx, the father of Communism said that religion is the opioid for the masses – something to inoculate us, to weaken the weak and strengthen the strong. But who among us is not weak? Who among us is stronger than death? As G.K. Chesterton said, “The truth is that irreligion is the opium of the people.” Why? Because everyone is facing the same end – death. But there was one who came from death alive – Christ the Righteous. And we love him! Look at verses 8-9.

3. The Outcome of Faith is The Salvation of Our Souls

If you have faith in yourself you cannot have faith in the Son. Without faith in Jesus no one will see God. We must stop looking to our own achievements our own merits and have faith in God. The formula is simple: Have faith in God – Be Saved. Keep trusting anything else – Stay Lost.

I wonder today if you are living by faith. If what Peter has said is true of you.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. Do you have the expectant hope of obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls?

Salvation, according to Scripture, is through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone....

Nothings stopping you – fly to God (see Spurgeon evening oct 20)

³ http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thoughtlife/2017/10/culture-eulogizes-hugh-hefner-and-enables-harvey-weinstein-eviscerates-mike-pence/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Newsletter&utm_campaign=Evangelical&utm_content=46