

Sola Fide

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If you have your Bibles, turn to Romans 3:28, where we are going to be looking at another classic text on one of the solas. This isn't *the* text, but it's one of many that would work for the whole sola fide theme: by faith alone.

It was on October 31, 1517, [the day before] All Saint's Day, when Martin Luther, a very faithful, diligent Roman Catholic, Augustinian monk, nailed to [the] church door [of] Castle Church in Wittenberg ninety-five propositions, or theses, [about which] he wanted to begin a dialogue. He picked October 31 [to post the theses] because he knew a lot of people would be [going] to church [the next day], and at that time, since there wasn't mass e-mail and spam, you would just take a note and nail it on the church door so [that] as all the believers were coming in and out of the church, they could read it.

Luther wrote [the theses] primarily as a reaction against something that was happening at the time. The Roman Catholic Church was busy in Germany selling indulgences. Indulgences are rights that the pope sometimes approves to have for sale in his area of control, [by which] believers can purchase "get out jail free" points. The Roman Catholic system teach[es the doctrine of] Purgatory, [which] is [said to be] a place where believers go after they die [and] before they get to heaven. It's a place where you suffer—a hell between death and glorification. You go there, and you suffer

the torments of hell to pay the penalty for your sin, [paying] fiery penance. Purgatory doesn't appear in the Bible. [It was a] doctrine that was invented and then was used by the [Roman Catholic] Church to extract money out of people. That is what was going on [when Luther posted the ninety-five theses].

At this point, when [Luther] nailed those ninety-five theses on the Wittenberg door, he didn't have a problem with Purgatory, or even with the sale of indulgences. He just felt that the pope wasn't aware that there were abuses going on in his realm. Germany was one of the places [those] abuses were happening, and [Luther felt] that surely the pope would be glad to know that [Luther] was fighting for the truth.

In Purgatory, believers suffer for ages, and so when indulgence[s are] offered by the pope, it allows people to purchase time off—kind of a fire-sale, get-out-of-Purgatory-free type of thing, [in which] you pay money and the pope then declares that you can spend less time [in Purgatory], or maybe, in certain instances, not go to Purgatory at all. How could this happen? The Roman Catholic Church teaches [that] there is [a] huge repository of good works [put there by] *really* godly people, like Mother Theresa or Mary. [These] people are so godly, they have so many good works to their credit, that not only can they get in to heaven without going to Purgatory [themselves], [but] they actually have extra good works, which go in to what is called the “treasury of merit.” That way, when you buy an indulgence, you can skip [a certain amount of time in Purgatory] because these “funds” have been taken from the treasury of merit, from [the works of] extra-godly saints, and been applied to you.

I think a lot of people don't realize this, [but] the Roman Catholic Church never changes its doctrine. It can't. A lot of times, when you grow up in America, and you see the Roman Catholic Church in America, you think you understand what Roman Catholicism is, but believe me, you don't know anything about what it's like, unless you go to a country where they have *real* Roman Catholicism. [For instance], when I went to Brazil, [I] saw some girl crawling on her knees for who knows how long she had been

going, saying Hail Marys every so often, [and] praying the rosary until her knees were bloody and raw. [She left] a trail of blood behind [her]. [She was doing this] so that God would approve of her. [There is also] a huge wall full of carved body parts of all imaginable shapes and sizes [that people use] to offer up [petitions] to a certain patron saint so that they can be healed of certain diseases. This is what's happening and has always happened in the Roman Catholic system ([but] not so much in America, where the Roman Catholic Church is quite liberal and in rebellion).

[The selling of indulgences] was going on in Germany [during Luther's time]. Specifically, there was one man—John Tetzel—who was really a nuisance. He was one of the criers, one of the men commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church to go out and collect indulgences. He was good. He was like a used car salesman: “You [have] to buy this now. If you don't buy this, you're going to be in Purgatory. You don't get a chance like this very often. It's time to do it now. Do it now, now, now!” He would badger, scare, threaten, and warn people. [In response, the] people were buying indulgences, get[ting] a little piece of paper that [indicated that they would] get time off in Purgatory.

Why would the pope [sell indulgences]? [He would do so] because he need[ed] funds to build a cathedral, or raise his standard of living, or whatever. John Tetzel was a nuisance, [and what he was doing] bothered Luther so much. [It wasn't] because of [the doctrine of] Purgatory, [or the sale of] indulgences, [it was] just because of [Tetzel's] irreverence [while he was doing the selling]. He would make up little ditties, [such as], “When a coin in the coffer sings, a soul from Purgatory springs.” It just [irked Luther] because [he] saw the abuse [and] avarice, [and] he saw that [Tetzel] wasn't concerned about the souls of people—he was [just] a money raiser.

At first, Luther nailed those ninety-five theses on the door of Wittenberg because he wanted to start dialogues about some abuses that were going on. Little did he know that [his theses] would be immediately taken down [from the door], translated into multiple languages, and distributed all over Germany. Pretty soon, Luther was the talk of all Germany. Not only that,

crowds [of people] were coming to hear him preach. They were packing out [Castle Church]—it's a huge church, too. They were packing it out to hear him preach through books of the Bible. Can you believe that? Somebody actually preached through books of the Bible sequentially.

Anyway, that's what Luther was doing. Luther, at this point, was saved, but his doctrine was in its infancy, and the Holy Spirit was illuminating his mind to the truth. As soon as the ninety-five theses went out, he was attacked so viciously [by] so many Roman Catholics that, [in response], he studied the Scriptures harder, and when he did, he found out that even more of what he thought he believed was true was false. [The more he studied the Scriptures, the more] it forced him to become more orthodox. This went on for several years. [Then] he had to appear before a diet, [which] is [a] group of inquisitors, so to speak, who questioned him and [before whom] he had to defend himself. I might give you the stats later, but basically, Luther was such a hard-working soul that almost half of [all of] the books being published at [that] time were from Martin Luther's pen. He bombarded the world, carpet-bombed the world, with scriptural teaching. That's what caused the Reformation.

On April 17, 1521, the Roman Catholic Church finally called for another diet to be held at Wyrms. [It was to be] a theological meeting [during which] they were going to confront, expose, and condemn Luther as a heretic. Luther's opponent was Johann Eck, who was a very fine debater. [He] had a very strong, booming voice, [and] was very logical [in his arguments]. They told Luther that he would have safe passage to Wyrms, where he would be tried. Well, that wasn't very good because not too long before that, another man was given safe passage—John Huss—and then they captured him and burned him at the stake. But, Luther went anyway. Knowing that his life was in danger, he went anyway, and with fear and trembling, [he] made it [with] the help of some friends. He was met by knights, and a huge crowd [of people who] were very pleased to see him, which Luther thought was kind of strange. He knew he had his followers in Wittenberg, and he knew that his writings were popular, but he didn't know what to

think [about that big crowd of people]. During the diet, Luther was examined by Johann Eck, a very passionate man, who, by degrees, showed everyone that Luther had, indeed, moved outside the pale of Roman Catholic doctrine and therefore was a heretic. Though Eck was not able to pass a sentence [on Luther], everybody knew [that Eck's accusation against Luther] meant that Luther was going to be burned at the stake.

Now, though Eck won the debate, it was a huge victory for Luther. He didn't even realize [it] at the time. God was using Martin Luther as the point of the spear for the Reformation, and [Luther] didn't even realize it. It just came to him in hindsight. Historians, as they look back, [say], "Look at what happened." Luther was bummed out that he was proven by Eck to not be Roman Catholic. Yet, this disappointment was Luther's greatest victory because all of Germany was so oppressed and so fed up with the oppression, the constant indulgences, the money [extortion], and the religious hypocrisy, that Luther, when he lost the debate with Eck, sent a message to all who were present. That [same message] raced across Germany: Luther stood up against the Roman Catholic Church. He's the only one who had ever done it, and so he became the hero and the champion [of the people]. [They were thinking,] "This guy is for us, for Germans. He's for the truth!" What's odd is [that] Luther, without realizing it, by losing, won. He won the allegiance of the entire country.

At this point, it wasn't quite solidified yet, but [it] was becoming very clear to [Luther that there] were two facts, two beliefs, that [he] held, which, if held to, [would] wipe out the entire Roman Catholic system. They were these. One: the doctrine of sola Scriptura, [which puts forth the idea] that it is the Bible and the Bible alone that gives us everything we need for faith and practice. You see, in the Roman Catholic system, the Bible is authoritative, [but] the writings of the Church fathers, *and* the conclusions of all the Church councils, *and* all the papal statements, decrees, [and] bulls [are] of equal authority to the Scriptures. [All of these documents and writings have] to be housed in a huge library [because] there's so much of it. [Then] Luther comes along and says [that he has] come to believe that the Bible

and the Bible alone is sufficient for all matters of faith and practice. Well, that empties out the whole Catholic library. Then, all of a sudden, where do you get [the doctrine of] Purgatory? Well, it's not from the Bible. Where do you get [the idea of] praying to Mary? Well, it's not in the Bible. Where do you get the worship of saints? It's not in the Bible. Where do you get indulgences? It's not in the Bible. [Do] you see how in just that one statement you wipe out the whole [Catholic] system?

That is why those who were against Luther, when they saw his writing, they saw him stick to the Scriptures, stick to the Scriptures, refer to the Scriptures, refer to the Scriptures, were freaking out because they realized, "If this catches on, we're done for!" So, that became one of the main, fundamental pillars of the Reformation: that the Bible and the Bible alone was the sole authority, the sole rule for all matters of doctrine, faith, and practice.

[The second fact, or belief, that Luther held] was justification by faith alone. This also was a terror to the Roman Catholic Church. Why? Why would it be a terror? Well, it was a terror for this reason. The Roman Catholic Church taught that salvation came through the Church, not Christ. What that means is [that] if you want to go to heaven, you can't go directly to Jesus. [The Catholic Church says], "No, no, no. You have to go through us. If you're good enough, and if we don't get mad at you, and if we say so, we will give you what you need so you can get to heaven, through us." Well, when your salvation is held by another sinful human, that's bad, especially when people, because of sin, use their power over [other] people to abuse [them].

And so, this is what was happening: If you could just go to Jesus, in faith, and be justified and right before God, then why [would] you need the whole priest system, mass, the infusion of grace, and all the sacraments to get saved? Well, you don't. That's what scared [the Roman Catholic Church]. Instead of a simple message of salvation by grace through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Roman Catholic Church substituted this huge, ritualistic monster that was designed to foster dependence

on the Church so that the Church could then use [the people's] dependence and the fear to [its] own advantage.

This is what we want to look at this morning. For our second sermon in Reformation month, I want to take you to a text [that] teaches us that justification is by faith alone, or, as it is commonly known, *sola fide*. This is one of the primary things that distinguishes Roman Catholics from Protestants. (If you don't know what "Protestant" means, it means "those who protest against" the Roman Catholic view that justification is by works.)

Turn to Romans 3. I'm going to read verses 21-31. If you were here last week, we went through the first part of this. We looked at verse 23, we talked about the context [and] how, before this section, Paul labors to show that all men are guilty. If you're a Jew, you're guilty before God and you're a sinner. If you're a Gentile, you're guilty before God and you're a sinner. If you're a moral person, you're guilty before God and you're a sinner. He ends [that section] with this whole string of quotations from the Old Testament that let[s] everybody know that every single person is a sinner—there are no exceptions—[and] everybody needs salvation. No one gets to heaven on the basis of his works. So, now, in [Romans 3:]21 and following, [Paul] begins to explain the solution to the problem that everybody is a sinner on [their] way to hell. He keeps going [for] several more chapters after this, but we're just going to read the context [in] verse[s] 21-31, and then we'll look at verse 28 specifically. Paul writes:

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the

sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

From verse 28, I want to point out two important concepts related to sola fide, by faith alone. One, so that you can understand how a person is justified, and two, so you can also look at your own [lives] to see if you yourselves have been justified by that one way.

First: You are justified by faith. Look at [Romans 3:]28. Paul says: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith.” I want you to know [that] every word here is significant. Look at that little, three-letter word “for.” It is a reference back to everything that Paul has said, namely that all men are sinners, justified by faith, by grace, so that no one has a right to boast about his salvation before God. That’s what [Paul] said immediately before [this set of verses]. So the word “for” is specially designed to fetch into our minds [the idea that], “You have no reason to boast before God if you are saved. None.” That means [that] you didn’t contribute anything, not even a speck of dust. Otherwise, you could have said, “Well, that’s my speck of dust,” see? You could boast if you did a little bit. There’s something inside of man that makes [him] long to help God save [him], even [if] it’s just a little hairsbreadth [of help]. You get to heaven, and [you say], “Yeah, I know Jesus did all that, but look at my hair[sbreadth]. I think it’s longer than yours. I think it’s a little thicker in diameter, too.” You see, men want, they lust, to help God save them. They just want to have a part. Their pride,

their desire for self-sufficiency, and autonomy, and to be their own god, makes them lust for that.

That whole idea, that we have no right whatsoever to boast before God, explains why Paul says what he does in [Romans 3:]28: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith.” When Paul says, “We maintain,” he is saying that “we have come to believe,” “we have become thoroughly convinced of,” “we have come to the place where we know for certain.” That’s what he means by “we maintain”—“we hold this truth to be self-evident,” you could say—that man is justified by faith.

Let’s just break this down. What does it mean to be justified? We talked about this last week, but we’re going to talk about it today because it’s important and you might not have been here last week. If you were [here], then you need a review. What does it mean to be justified? “Justification” is a word that basically means “to be declared right before God.” It’s a legal term [meaning] “to declare someone right, or just, before God.” When somebody places his faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, God declares him to be right. It’s a legal thing. He’s the judge, we have offended the judge, and the judge says, “I declare you just in My sight because you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ.” Therefore, [we are] justified. Please understand that justification is not that God makes you righteous. There’s a difference. He *declares* you to be righteous. Even if you’re saved and justified before God, you’re still a sinner, aren’t you? We still sin, right? That’s what Paul goes on to say in Romans [7:24]: “Wretched man that I am!” Why? [It is] because he keeps sinning. So, justification isn’t when God *makes* you righteous, it’s when He *declares* you to be righteous based off of what Jesus did.

Remember, we are all sinners, [and] God can’t set aside His justice. He *has* to have His justice satisfied. He will “by no means allow the guilty to go unpunished” [see Exodus 34:7]. If we are sinners, then we are guilty [and] therefore God must punish us. So what are we going to do? Well, God, then, has to figure out a way—which He did—to satisfy His justice that He might justify those who are ungodly. That’s why He sent Jesus to

earth to die on the cross, to be a sin-bearer, to become accursed for us, to die in our place, as a substitute for us.

I want to show you this. Turn to Isaiah 53, which we probably all know is one of the great servant songs of the book of Isaiah. There are several of these in the book, [in which] Isaiah writes about this servant—in this case, the suffering servant—who would come. This is a picture of the Messiah. It's a prophecy of the Messiah, of Jesus, before He even came on the scene. It is written as if it already occurred, which is a common prophetic device. I'm going to have you look at a few verses and [I'll] do some quick commentary. I want you to see this whole idea of substitution and how that relates to justification. Look at Isaiah 53:4. It says: "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried;" notice He bore our griefs and our sorrows. So, even though there are griefs, there are sorrows, *He* bore them, not us. He was a substitute. [The verse continues]: "Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted." [Verse 5 says]: "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed." Notice that Jesus is described as being pierced, crushed, and chastened for *our* iniquities, *our* well being, in order that we may be healed. Here, you again see, over and over, that *we've* done the bad deed and that Jesus is suffering for it.

[Isaiah 53:]6 [says]: "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him." Notice [that] we're the wayward sheep, we're the ones who go our own way, we're the ones who disobey God, and rebelled against God, and did our own thing, and violated the Word of God. And so, what was the consequence? God took all of our iniquities, and He laid them, they fell, upon Jesus, not us: [that's] substitution. But that's not all. Look at [Isaiah 53:]10: "But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering." Here, Jesus is described as the sacrificial lamb. Jesus would be crushed, put to grief, as a guilt offering. He's the animal, so to speak, as [would have been used] in

the Old Testament, the innocent party that was slain on behalf of somebody else: a substitute.

[Isaiah 53:]11 [says]: “As a result of the anguish of His soul,” that is, Christ’s soul, “He,” that is, the just God, “will see it,” that is, the suffering of Christ, “and be satisfied,” that is, His holy justice would be satisfied seeing Christ suffer in the place of sinners. “By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many.” How could God do that? [It is] because Jesus suffered, bore, was crushed, etc., in place of, as a substitute for, sinners. How or why does this happen? What is the mechanism? He says it very plainly at the end of [Isaiah 53:]11: “As He will bear their iniquities.” That is, they commit the iniquities, but Jesus bears them on His frame, on the cross.

[Isaiah 53:]12 [says]: “Therefore, I will allot Him,” that is, Jesus, “a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death.” Here, Jesus is described as a drink offering being poured out to death. “And was numbered with the transgressors,” that is, He hung on the cross between two thieves. “Yet He Himself bore the sin of many.” Jesus suffered for the sins of others, “And interceded for the transgressors.” Having satisfied the wrath of God against sin, [Jesus] seeks sinners out, and intercedes for them before the Father, having suffered their penalty in their place. That, people, is as clear a description of the love of God [as can be] found anywhere in the Scriptures.

What is love? “God so loved the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son” [see John 3:16]. “God demonstrates His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” [see Romans 5:8]. That is it, you know? “Amazing love, how can it be? That Thou my God shouldst die for me?”¹ That’s it. Jesus, the very God incarnate, [came] in order to satisfy the justice of God. He Himself [suffered] the penalty that was due us, for our iniquities, our sins. “The chastening of our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed” [Isaiah 53:5]. He was crushed for us.

¹Lyrics taken from “And Can It Be That I Should Gain” by Charles Wesley.

That's substitution, [and] that relates very closely to justification because God is able to justify us because of the substitutionary death of Christ. [Paul] says in Romans 3:28: "A man is justified by faith." What is faith? Well, faith is that instrument that lays hold of Christ and His work on the cross so that God can declare us to be right. But the problem is [that] there are different kinds of faith. [There are] two primary different categories of faith. You need to understand these different categories so that you aren't confused, and so you aren't using the wrong kind of faith and end up in hell thinking you're on your way to heaven. One kind of faith that we can have is just a merely intellectual faith, a faith that believes in the facts [and] gives assent that they are true. "Yes, I know who Jesus is. Yes, I know He was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, [is the] Son of God, died on the cross, [was] buried, and rose again on the third day. [He] did the miracles. Yeah, I believe all that. I believe the Bible is true. I believe it." OK, that's one kind [of faith]: intellectual faith. Then there is another kind of faith that is intellectual but also trusts. Yes, it has that knowledge, but it also trusts in, relies upon, that knowledge. It's not merely agreeing that, "Oh, yeah, that's true," but it is trusting in what is said to be true.

Let's say [that] one day we're talking, and I look down and notice [that] you have this big, heavy duty leather belt on.

I [say], "Man, that's a pretty heavy duty belt you've got there."

You [say], "Oh, I could probably lift a car [with it]."

I [say], "Do you think it would lift your weight?"

"Oh, no problem! Look at the thing. It's huge."

I [say], "Oh, good. So you're convinced that it would hold you."

"Oh, yeah."

"All right, well, let's go to downtown LA, [and] go up on the roof of [a] skyscraper. You know [how] they have those little swing arms they put over the edge [of the roof] to hold the window washer carts and lower them down? We're going to hook a little hook onto your belt buckle, and dangle you out over the city, OK?"

"No way!"

I [ask], “Well, why? What’s wrong? You just told me that there was no problem, that your belt could hold you up.”

“Yeah, but I’m not trusting my life into the hands of some belt.”

Well, that’s exactly the kind of intellectual faith that doesn’t save anybody. “Oh, man! Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He was buried and rose again on the third day! He’s the Son of God. He was born of a virgin. I’m telling you, if you believe in Jesus, you’ll be saved.” Really? Well, then, let’s put your whole life [on the line] and trust [in that truth]. Let’s let Him control you, keep you from sins, direct you, [and] move you to sacrifice for Him. “Oh, well, I’m not going to do that.” Then you’re not saved.

You see, saving faith is a trusting faith, not merely an intellectual faith. What kind of faith do you have? That is the issue. [Do you] remember what Jesus said: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” [John 10:27]? They don’t hear His voice and then *not* follow Him. Then they’re lost sheep. If they don’t follow the Shepherd, they’re lost sheep.

A man is justified by faith, [and it is] a faith that trusts in and relies upon Jesus completely. Be warned: Not all faith is saving faith. You see this [fact] in the Gospels. For instance, in John 6, Jesus has this huge group of disciples following Him. Why? [It is] because Jesus is an incredible teacher, [He] is doing miracles, [He] is able to feed thousands, [and He] can out-argue anybody. He’s the guy to hang with if you want to [be near] the champion. He [has] a large group of disciples, but what’s interesting is [that] Jesus knows that many of them only have an intellectual faith.

If you were to ask them, “Do you believe Jesus is the Messiah?”

[They would say], “Yeah.”

“Do you believe that He can do miracles?”

“Well, of course He can. I mean, I was there. I’ve seen Him.” They have [an] intellectual faith until Jesus decides to weed some of them out.

[Jesus] says, “If you’re going to be My disciple, you need to eat My flesh and drink My blood.”

All of a sudden their eyes open up, [and they say], “What?”

Jesus says, “Oh, do you have problems with that? Well, just wait until you see Me sitting at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty on high.”

“What?”

“You know what? I *know* what is in some of your hearts,” [and the implied [but unspoken statement is] “because I’m omniscient. I know everything.”

“What?”

John 6:66, says: “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.” They quit following. Why? [It was] because their faith was only an intellectual faith. It wasn’t a trusting faith. True, saving faith trusts and relies upon Jesus.

James [also] addresses faith. If you’ve ever read James 2:14 and following, it seems like he’s contradicting Paul in Romans 3, but he’s not. Paul, in Romans 3, is saying, “This is the kind of faith that saves you.” James is saying, “This is what saving faith produces in a believer’s life.” So, Paul constantly says, “No works. No works. No works.” James constantly says, “Faith,” that is, after you’re saved, “produces works, produces works, produces works.”

This is what [James] says [about faith and works]. [We’re going to look at] a couple of the verses, [but] you can read the whole passage at your leisure this week during a quiet time. Look at [James 2:]18[-19]. You don’t have to turn there, I’ll read it quick[ly].

But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

This has been used by many people to say [that] faith without works, [works] that save a person, is useless. No. When it comes to saving faith,

it's without works. Once you are saved, faith then causes you—the grace of God moves you—to obey God. That's where the works come in, and that's what James is talking about. Then he goes on to quote that “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS” to affirm that [statement] [James 2:23].

But just remember that you can know all about Jesus, you can have a faith, and yet not know Christ, like those people in Matthew 7:[21] and following, [who say]: “Lord, Lord, have we not. . . .” They know who Jesus is, they're in the church, they're trusting in Jesus, they're doing works in Jesus' name, and He says: “Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you” [see Matthew 7:23].

[If you were to ask Jesus], “Well, didn't they believe in You?” [He would answer], “Well, yeah, they had an intellectual faith. They knew who I was. They were in the church. They said they believed in Me. They said they loved Me. They said they followed Me. They were even active [in the Church], but they didn't have a relationship with Me. They didn't have *saving* faith in Me.”

We learn from Paul, in the first part of [Romans 3:]28, “that a man is justified,” made right before God, on the basis of faith, which is a believing, trusting faith that relies upon what Jesus did and who Jesus is. Then, to clarify things more thoroughly, we come to the second point: You are justified *apart* from the works of the Law. Look at [Romans 3:]28. Paul says, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” This phrase “apart from the works of the Law” is huge. Be glad we're in this series because I could just bog down forever right here.

I'm going to try and paint you a parallel here because it is great once you get it. Paul knows that in his audience he has Jewish readers. He knows how Jews think because he is a Jew—he was a “Pharisee of Pharisees” [see Philippians 3:5]. He even describes himself, [in reference] to the Law of Moses [and] keeping the Law, [saying], “I was blameless” [see Philippians 3:6]. He was fanatic. He knows what the Jews understood at the time, what was going through the minds of his readers, and he labors [to help them

understand this concept]. He loves them so much [that] he's trying to help them understand that salvation isn't of [their] efforts. [You don't just do good works] and then God says, "OK, you've been good enough. I'm going to save you." That just doesn't work. [Salvation is] apart from works. I don't know how else he could have said it. He says it over and over again: "Apart from works" [Romans 3:28], "that no one could boast" [see Ephesians 2:9], which implies no works.

But you might ask yourself, "Well, how did the Jews come to that place? Was it always that way?" Some have thought, wrongly, that in the Old Testament people were saved by works, and in the New Testament they're saved by grace. No. There has only been one way that anybody has ever been saved, and that's been by grace through faith. Paul, and we don't have time to go there, argues for this in Romans 4, when he talks about Abraham, who was justified by God *before* the giving of the Law of Moses and *before* he was circumcised. Oh, it's a brilliant argument.

You might say, "Well, then how did they get there? If that's how it was, if Abraham was justified by faith apart from the works of the Law before the Law was given, and they see themselves as children of Abraham, and followers of Abraham, then how in the world did they ever get to the place where they [were] trusting in their works?" The same way that everybody gets there who doesn't know Christ: by small degrees, usually.

[Do] you remember the great statement in the beginning of Deuteronomy? Deuteronomy is the second giving of the Law, right before [the Israelites] enter the Promised Land. They received the Law in Leviticus and Exodus and Numbers, but right before they enter into the Promised Land, Moses writes an expanded edition [of the Law], and helps them see how to apply [it] to the societies that they're going to be setting up when they go into the [Promised Land]. He's writing this second Law, and in the first chapters, he basically lays down an historical summary, [then] the Ten Commandments, and then in [Deuteronomy] 6, he [writes down] this huge statement, which is called the "great Shamah," which means "to hear." "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the

LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” [Deuteronomy 6:4-5]. There it is, the great Shamah.

What comes after that? The Law. So what does that mean? It means this: First, you know who God is, second you believe in God, which means you have a relationship with God, and out of your love [for] that relationship, then you obey the Law. The Law doesn't give you the relationship; the relationship makes you want to obey the Law out of love. That's how it always was, and it's never been any different. That's why Jesus says the same thing in the New Testament: “If you love Me, you will [keep My commandments]” [John 14:15]. There is first the relationship, then the obedience. The obedience doesn't cause the relationship; the relationship should lead to the obedience. That's how it has always been.

Well, then the question is, “How did [the Jews] miss it?” [They missed it] because at the end of Deuteronomy, there are blessings and curses. Do you remember that? And so, [that was] how they thought. [In fact], this is how a lot of Christians think in the Church today. When I explain this, you're going to [think], “Oh, yeah. I've done that sometimes.” Here it is: You disobey God, things go bad in your life, and you think, “God doesn't like me,” right? Uh huh. You can go ahead [and admit it]. Yeah, people are smiling, [thinking], “I hope nobody's watching.” Yeah. That's what happens, right? Your car breaks down, and you [think], “Oh, I must be sinning.” We have this idea that if we sin, then bad things happen; if we obey, then good things happen.

[You might think], “OK, as long as I keep doing things [right], God will like me, God will like me, God will like me.” Notice how all of a sudden you've switched and you've implied that the reason for the blessings and curses was to maintain a relationship with God, to keep [your]self saved, instead of to express love to God. God says, “Do this and I'll bless you. You do this and I'll curse you, not because I'm cutting Myself off from you, but because I'm going to chasten you to correct you so [that] you do what's right so I can bless you again because we have this relationship.” It's

discipline. God is the God who justifies the ungodly by faith. That's how Abraham was justified.

Well, the Jews, over the course of time, begin to trust more and more in their works, and pretty soon they were very concerned about keeping the Law, being Jews, because [they believed that] that is what got them into heaven. This is the permeating thought that Paul writes to refute, especially in Romans and Galatians. That [wrong perception of the blessings and curses] was not God's intention. It was not His intention from the time of Abraham, which Paul uses as an argument to explain that.

This is the same kind of thing that [Martin] Luther was dealing with. As a matter of fact, when Luther wrote his commentary on this verse, this is what he said (Now, I'm going to read this and there are going to be a couple of things that might make you perk up. Just hang tight.):

When the Apostle says that we are justified "Without the deeds of the law," he does not speak of the works of faith and grace; for he who does such works, does not believe that he is justified by them. While doing such works of faith, the believer seeks to be justified by faith. What the Apostle means by "deeds of the law" are works in which the self-righteous trust as if, by doing them, they are justified and so are righteous on account of their works.

There are some fearful souls who are so concerned about maintaining justification by grace through faith alone [that] they are good for nothing. They are couch-potato Christians. They [say], "Listen, I'm saved by faith and I can't do anything because it's all of Christ, and it's no[t] of me."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah."

"So, when God commands you to repent in [His] Word, did you repent or did God repent?"

"Uhhhh."

“When God commands you to have faith, did you have faith or did God have faith for you?”

“Well. . .”

“When God says, ‘I want you to obey Me and follow Me,’ do you obey and follow Him, or does God obey and follow Himself?”

“Well, yeah, I. . .” You see that? That’s [why] Luther says “works of faith and grace.” Of course we repent by grace, we believe by grace, we have faith by grace, right? We are justified by faith. That faith is a gift of God [see Ephesians 2:8].

One time I had somebody, an elder in a church, tell me, “We are saved by grace through faith, but we have to believe. That’s not something God gives us.”

I said, “Really?” Whenever [a confrontation like this] happens, if you were to look really closely here on my carotid artery, you would see it throbbing rapidly. I said, “[Do you remember] when Jesus is speaking to those people in John 6 who want to do the works of God? Do you remember that little discussion, you know, ‘How can we do the works of God?’ ”

“Yeah.”

“[Do you] remember what Jesus said in John 6:29? ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.’ Did you get that? What is the work God does? He causes people to believe, to have faith, in other words. Ephesians 2:8 [says]: ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves.’ ”

“Well, I thought that’s the salvation.”

“Sure it is.”

“I thought that’s the grace.”

“Sure it is, and it’s the faith, too. [In] Philippians 1:29, we read: ‘For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.’ ”

“You mean God grants us the ability to believe in Him?”

Well, that’s what the Bible teaches. That’s [why] the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 12:2 describes Jesus as “the author and perfecter of faith.” If it

was up to us, if God's grace didn't intervene, we would just run away from God. We love darkness rather than light, for our deeds are evil [see John 3:19]. We just don't want to be bothered. God's grace then comes into our lives and makes us want to believe, and yes, we believe by grace. That's what Luther is talking about.

Bruce Demarest, in his excellent work *The Cross and Salvation*, writes: "Only the power of God through the Spirit can produce living faith in spiritually dead sinners.... Faith is not the human condition for receiving new life; it is the divinely given instrument by which God saves lost souls."² Yet the Jews wandered from [the] fundamental truth that they needed to believe God, have faith in God, be justified by that faith, and because of the relationship they then had with God, they were to obey Him out of love. They missed it, just like many do today.

Paul knows this. It's in his mind. He knows it's in the mind of his hearers, and that's why he spends the latter part of [Romans] 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 dealing with this. Men just want to have a part [in their own salvation]. They are just dying to [say], "Oh, God, can't I just have a half a percent? Can't you just make [salvation] half a percent me so [that] when we get to heaven, you can put me on a little throne and I could boast? [I] could compare with other saints, [and I could say], 'I did a little more than you did.'" No. No, that doesn't work with God. It's either all God or it's nothing. That's why Luther says, "Anybody who does the works of faith in grace never boasts in them or thinks that they are justified by them in their own merit."

So this is the system that Martin Luther was trapped in. Just as the Jews, by degrees, wandered away from the truth, so the Roman Catholic Church did the exact same thing. Just like Paul, then, came onto the scene to blow open this false idea [for the Jews], so Luther is used by God to come on the scene to blow open the false idea [as put forth by the Roman Catholic Church]. The Roman Catholic Church had substituted this huge, ritualistic system [for the truth of salvation by faith alone]. Rituals [in and

²Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), p. 263.

of themselves] aren't bad. We have our own rituals here [at Calvary Bible Church]. It's not the rituals [that are bad, per se], it's when the rituals eclipse the truth and then replace the truth, and then people begin to trust in the manmade part, thinking that works somehow make them right before God. It never happens, [and] it never will happen.

When Luther began benignly to write those ninety-five theses, he thought he was doing the pope a favor. Then it just caused this huge firestorm that rippled out all over Germany. At the Diet of Wyrms, Luther was tried by Eck, and then they had to whisk [Luther] away. He didn't even know where he was going. They just captured him and snuck him out. Pretty soon, he was riding through the forest with these people on horses. All of a sudden, he got to Wartburg castle, and there he let his hair and beard grow long, and he wore the clothes of a soldier. [He] kept a sword clanking at his side in a scabbard to look the part [and blend in]. He thought somebody might come and assassinate him. This was a radical change of life from what Luther was used to as a university professor.

One of his biographers writes that Luther:

complained of idleness and soft living. He took walks in the woods, and delighted to find wild strawberries. He once or twice took part in the hunt, and saw hares and partridges taken with nets and dogs, "an occupation," he said, "for idle men."

His biographer goes on to say:

"What he called idleness most men would call hard work; a multifarious correspondence, answering the theological faculty of Paris, attacks on the [Papal] Bull, a series of sermons on the Epistles and Gospels for the day, tracts [against] celibacy and monastic vows, and above all a translation of the New Testament into German from the original Greek. This is what

[Luther] calls, writing to [his friend and mentor] Spalitan, sitting the whole day in leisure reading the Greek and Hebrew Bibles.”³

[Luther is basically saying], “I mean, come on. I was here a whole year, and all I was able to do is write a couple hundred sermons, eighteen books, and translate the whole New Testament from Greek into [German]. I was idle!” The guy was a workhorse.

When Luther came to the text that we are looking at this morning, he did something pretty daring [with] Romans 3:2[8]. He translated the verse this way: “For we hold that a person is justified without works of the Law, through faith *alone*.” Did you notice anything different there? There’s a little word there at the end—alone—that Luther added. And, oh, I am telling you, it caused him no end of grief because it’s not in the Greek. He shouldn’t have stuck it in there. Of course, at this time, the Roman Catholic legions were clawing and scratching at every single thing he wrote, trying to prove him to be a heretic and disqualify him in the eyes of the people. Luther, when he’s translating this [verse], [sees] the whole context [as] so definitive that [he decides], well, if there is no boasting, and he’s talking about faith, and [Paul] says, “without Law” he means faith *alone*. So, he put “alone” in there.

Now, you know what? If you have a decent Bible translation, [you will see that] it has a lot of words in italics. Those are added to clarify things. So, it’s not unusual. [But, Luther] was severely criticized by his Roman Catholic opponents because [that word “alone”] didn’t appear in the Greek. [They claimed] he was playing fast and loose with the Word of God, which is [a] pretty interesting [accusation] for a group of people who have an entire library of works that [are supposedly] equal authority to the Bible.

[Luther] was one who defied the Roman Catholic tyranny, and translated the New Testament into the common language of [the] people. He did

³Thomas Lindsay, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Started the Reformation* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), p. 114.

an excellent job because he was raised as a peasant, so he knew peasant language really well, and [he also knew both the] academic and original languages really well, so he was able to take all of this and write a very clear, understandable version of the Bible [for the] common German people. That was amazing. And, [he] did it during his “leisure” at Wartburg Castle while he was doing a million other things.

Luther’s days were spent dealing with attacks. Even in Wartburg Castle things were brought to him, and he was just constantly battling, and fighting, and people were attacking [him]. This is how he saw it: People are going to hell. People are dying, thinking they can be justified by their works and they need to know the truth. [As a result of this way of thinking], he didn’t have a lot of tact sometimes when dealing with his Roman Catholic opponents. He saw them as those [who were] leading people to hell, and often responded like Jesus did, when [Jesus] said [things like], “You vipers [see Matthew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33; Luke 3:7]! You blind guides of the blind [see Matthew 15:14]. You snakes!” Jesus was pretty aggressive with people. Luther was, too, but Luther might not have had the sanctified quality that Jesus did.

When [Luther’s] critics began to attack him, and attack him, and attack him, finally, he was provoked. I get attacked sometimes. I just got an eight-page letter from somebody explaining to me why I was a heretic, but I don’t get those a whole lot anymore. Periodically I do, but I don’t get them by the truckload. Luther, [however], *was* getting them by the truckload, and he was just fed up with a bunch of unbelievers trying to tell him how to understand the Bible when they themselves weren’t saved, didn’t have the Holy Spirit in them, were trusting in their works, and were trusting in a huge, false system. It just made him sick. He finally got provoked to the [point at which] he wrote a document called “An Open Letter on Translating” because they were so irritated about his translations of Romans 3:28. So, on September 15, 1530, from Nuremburg, Luther writes this:

Why should I even bother to talk about translating so much? If I were to explain all the reasons and considerations behind my words, I would need an entire year. I have learned by experience what an art and what a task translating is, so I will not tolerate some papal donkey or mule acting as my judge or critic.

This is a mild portion from Luther, by the way. He says:

They have not tried it. If anyone does not like my translations, he can ignore it; and may the devil repay him for it if he dislikes or criticizes my translations without my knowledge or permission. If it needs to be criticized, I will do it myself. If I do not do it, then let them leave my translations in peace. Each of them can do a translation for himself that suits him—what do I care?

[He said this] because he knew they didn't have the academic skill to do their own translation. He goes on to say: "This I can testify with good conscience," now you begin to see [that] though he is very passionate, [he is also a man of] humility. Listen to this:

This I can testify with good conscience: I gave my utmost effort and care and I had no ulterior motives. I have not taken or wanted even a small coin in return. Neither have I made any by it. God knows that I have not even sought honor by it, but I have done it as a service to the dear Christians and to the honor of the One who sits above, who blesses me every hour of my life. If I had translated a thousand times more diligently, I should not have deserved to live or have a sound eye for even a single hour.

He's saying, "Listen, I didn't do this to make money. I didn't get a single penny from this translation. I didn't do it for honor. I did it for the love of

my Savior and the love of fellow Christians. That's the only reason I did it. I want you to know, I am a sinner, and I deserve hell." What do you say about that? He goes on to say:

All I am and have to offer is of his mercy and grace, indeed, of his precious blood and bitter sweat. Therefore, God willing, all of it will also serve to his honor, joyfully and sincerely. I may be insulted by the scribblers and papists, but true Christians, along with Christ, their Lord, bless me. And I am more than amply rewarded if just one Christian acknowledges me as a workman with integrity.

I care nothing about the papal donkeys, as they are not good enough to acknowledge my work and, if they were to bless me, it would break my heart. Their insults are my highest praise and honor. . . Therefore the matter itself, at its very core, requires us to say: "Faith alone justifies." The nature of the German language also teaches us to say it that way. In addition, I have the precedent of the holy fathers. The dangers confronting the people also compel it, for they cannot continue to hang onto works and wander away from faith, losing Christ, especially at this time when they have been so accustomed to works they have to be pulled away from them by force.

It is for these reasons that it is not only right but also necessary to say it as plainly and forcefully as possible: "Faith alone saves without works!" I am only sorry I did not also add the words *alle and aller*, and say, "without any works of any laws." That would have stated it with the most perfect clarity. Therefore, it will remain in the New Testament, and though all the papal donkeys go stark raving mad they shall not take it away. Let

this be enough for now. God willing, I shall have more to say about it in the treatise *On Justification*.⁴

He went on to write [that treatise], defending justification by faith alone. He went into huge detail about it. That's what makes Reformation month so significant. That's why there are Protestant denominations. That's it, right there: Faith alone justifies. It's either works or faith alone. If you were to look [at notes from] the Council of Trent, which happened in response to Luther, they say [that] anybody who believes that a man is justified by faith alone is accursed of God. Here we all are, accursed by God, according to the infallible decree of the Roman Catholic Church.

We know that Luther has it right. The question I have for you this morning is: Are you going to heaven? Do you *know* you're going to heaven? Are you sure you're going to heaven? If you[re] sit[ting] there, and you[re] thinking], "Well, yeah, I think so," [then ask yourself] why. Why are you going to heaven? If [the thought] comes to your mind, "Well, I've been a good person. I've tried to go to church. I haven't murdered anybody." [If] anything you do—"I've read my Bible; I've given tithes"—comes to mind other than "I have placed my faith in Christ alone," or "By the grace of God," or "Jesus' death on the cross for me," or something like that, [you might have a problem]. If your thoughts are directed toward Jesus there's very good hope for you. If, [however], your thoughts are directed toward anything you do, then I would submit to you [that] you are still trusting in your works.

I would exhort you, I would beg you, I would plead with you to come to Christ on the basis of faith alone. Believe it in your heart that if you trust Christ in faith, God will declare you to be righteous because of what Jesus has done. Period. I love that line from "Rock of Ages":

Nothing in my hand I bring,

⁴"An Open Letter on Translating" written Sept. 15, 1530.

Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.
Foul, I to the fountain fly.
Wash me, Savior, or I die.⁵

That is it, man. That is it. You come with nothing and then God, by His good grace, declares you to be righteous because Christ has done it all. Then, once you have the relationship, you can then follow Christ by God's grace, trusting and living by faith day-by-day. Those works then flow from your relationship with God, but they never create it. So, I don't know where you are this morning, but I want you to know [that] justification is by faith alone. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Luther, for raising him up. It's obvious he didn't even know what You were using him for at the beginning. He wasn't even sure of some of the things that he later wrote with much clarity and conviction. I pray that all of us would leave here praising You, rejoicing that You have saved us not because we are good, but because You are good; not because of our good works added with grace, but because of grace alone, through faith alone in the Person and work of Christ alone. Father, if there [are people] here [who don't] know you this morning, may they come with a trusting, believing faith alone. And, Father, may You change them into new creatures in Christ [see 2 Corinthians 5:17]. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible[®], ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, by The Lockman Foundation.

⁵Lyrics taken from "Rock of Ages" by Augustus M. Toplady.