

“FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church
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Sermon Texts: Romans 3:26-28

Belgic Confession: Article 22

Introduction.

The question before us this evening is the greatest of all questions. It's the Philippian Jailer question. "What must I do to be saved?"

And Paul and Silas gave the simple answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31).

But that answer was so simple that many have misunderstood it and some have even taken offense at it.

Preaching salvation in Jesus Christ is "stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles" (I Corinthians 1:23).

I'm reminded of the story of Naaman, the Syrian General, who came to Israel to Elisha to seek healing for his leprosy. Elisha's servant told Naaman to go wash seven times in the Jordan River and Naaman was greatly offended by this.

II Kings 5:11-14 But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Many people today take offense at the answer, believe in Jesus, put your faith in Jesus, confess Jesus with your lips and believe in your heart, or repent and believe.

Sophisticated people, intellectual people, proud people, politically correct people, take offense at this simple message to trust and obey Jesus. They want something more complicated, something more mysterious, or more philosophically profound, or more difficult, or something that requires some great effort from them, perhaps something more severe requiring "asceticism and severity to the body" (Colossians 2:23).

Self-made men prefer self-made religion, religion after their own making.

How can an unjust person stand in the presence of a just God? He must first be justified. How is that person justified, on what grounds? That's the central question.

Do we do something first before God will make the legal judgment that we are justified? Or does God declare us just before we are in ourselves actually just?

What must man do to escape the wrath of God and be justified, saved, accepted and reconciled to God?

The answer of the naturalist, the universalist/Unitarian, the one who is indifferent.

God is a benevolent God, quick to forgive, quick to show mercy and great goodness. A loving God would not be a God of wrath, He would not condemn anyone to eternal hell. He knows we are weak and foolish, and He will have mercy of us and save us without requiring anything be satisfied or done.

This view requires that cast aside all justice, righteousness, Law, truth, holiness, or any moral standards. This view cancels out the cross. This view says the sinner is justified without any justification.

The answer of the legalist.

We are justified and saved on account of our own righteousness and works, by our own obedience to the moral standards of God. We work to satisfy His own sense of justice.

But there is none who is righteous.

Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The answer of the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestants today.

It's a variation of the legalist answer. We work to add to what Christ did to gain our salvation. This is the "Jesus plus" view of justification.

For Roman Catholics justification begins with baptism, is added to by good works and penance and then what is lacking in this life is made up in purgatory.

But many Protestants are just as guilty of trying to add to what Christ has done in order to gain or secure their acceptance with God.

It's as if to say, Christ undergoes the agonies of the cross so that we can add to His work and partially justify ourselves and receive some of the glory. This view confuses and combines Christ's work of justification and our work in sanctification.

Nothing done by us can in any way be the ground of our salvation.

The answer of the Arminian.

We are justified and saved by our faith when we chose Christ and put our faith in Him. So our faith is the thing that saves us. Faith takes the place of Christ's righteousness as the ground by which we are saved. Faith becomes our own work by which we are saved.

All one must do is just believe and they can be saved. We decide, we chose. The emphasis is on our response. It's man-centered.

I can summarize all these positions as either there is no righteousness; or there is our own righteousness; or there is our own righteousness added to another's righteousness.

But none of these answers satisfies because there is a holy and just God and we are unjust and unholy. We are still left with the question, what must man do to escape the wrath of God and be justified and saved and reconciled to God?

Remember Jesus prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Three times the Son of God:

Matthew 26:39 ... fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

"Father, if there is any other way." But this was the only way that people could be redeemed and reconciled to the Father.

After searching out all possible scenarios, the only one that satisfies the righteous requirements of God and of His Holy Law is the death of His only Son.

The Answer of the Scripture and the Reformers.

"We are justified and saved only on account of the righteousness of Christ—that is the vicarious obedience of Christ—the righteousness of another, imputed to us and received by faith alone."

Philippians 3:9 ... not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

This is not an intrinsic righteousness, a righteousness that is inside of us.
This is not a works righteousness, a righteousness done by our works.
This is not faith as righteousness. Faith is not what makes us righteous.

Belgic Confession, Article 22

Article 22 carefully outlines the Biblical and Reformed understanding of our justification by faith.

The source of faith.
The function of faith.
The sufficiency of the object of our faith.

In previous articles we have confessed Christ as our great high priest who is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Christ is our perfect substitute who atones for our sins by His blood.

Now we come to consider how these benefits may be obtained, how they may be made ours. How do we make this salvation personal?

The source of our faith is the Holy Spirit.

Article 22 says we need true knowledge of this great mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. Where can we get this true knowledge? What's the connection between true faith and true knowledge?

The answer is that the Holy Spirit is the one who lights the fire of true faith. It's the Holy Spirit who plants the seeds of faith in the soil of our hearts. The Spirit creates faith through the Word.

I Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

John 1:9-11 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

John 3:19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

To be a Christian our hearts must be illuminated by the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:10ff).

Without the Spirit of truth we cannot know the truth. He is the one who opens our sin-darkened minds and eyes.

The Spirit starts this work before we are converted and slowly opens us to an awareness of the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. He convicts us concerning sin.

The Spirit is the one who makes our sin more and more repulsive to us and makes Christ more and more precious to us, more and more a priceless treasure to us.

God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, including the first gift, ***the gift of faith.***

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The function of faith is that it embraces Jesus and Jesus alone.

Faith is the method, not the ground or the beginning of salvation. Faith is the conduit, the *instrument*, the scalpel. Faith is the God-ordained, God-given means through which He saves us.

Faith makes it clear that what is being received is purely gift and that nothing is required of us except to receive it.

We don't praise the pipe, we praise the water. We don't praise the scalpel, we praise the surgeon who wielded the scalpel. The scalpel was just the means by which the healing was administered.

This is a key point of the Reformation in correction of the Roman Catholic error that faith was a meritorious action on our part by which God became our debtor and rewards us with salvation.

It was Christ Plus verses Christ Alone. It was man-centered verses God-centered.

We are justified by the work of Christ and we receive it by Spirit enabled faith in Christ.

The object of faith and the sufficiency of that object.

The instrument is faith, the object is Christ. Article 22 states this twice.

Faith is never vague or nebulous or drifting or free floating. Faith is never blind faith. God doesn't call us into darkness, He calls us out of darkness.

Faith moves us from uncertainty to certainty. Faith is an object-oriented response. Faith always fixes on something and that something is the object of faith. It trusts in something.

Christ is either a completely sufficient Savior or He is incomplete and insufficient and we have to look elsewhere for the rest of our sufficiency.

To say anything less than a completely sufficient Savior is a gross blasphemy. It is a heresy and a lie and a stumbling block to salvation.

There is no righteousness in us, so we must look completely outside of ourselves to find any hope of right standing with God.

When we embrace Christ, we embrace His work and His merit.

Romans 3:28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

There is nothing in us or nothing we can do that makes us *acceptable* to God. The ground of our justification is Christ and Christ alone.

Application and conclusion.

When we stand before God on the judgment day, whose works do you want to set before Him? Your works or Christ's works? Which works do you want to rely on? Whose righteousness do you want to trust or lift up? Yours or Christ's?

Rubbish or righteousness? Garbage or grace?

If we present Christ's works and Christ's righteousness, God will then impute all of Christ's righteousness and all of Christ's good works and all of Christ's merit to us.

That's the wonderful benefit Article 22 ends with.

Christ makes available to us and in our place all His works and merits; and they are more than enough to cover and absolve all our sins.

There is nothing more that must be done to make you acceptable to God. He accepts you solely on the merits of Jesus' saving work on the cross.

In Christ alone, by God's grace alone through the instrument of faith alone.

Now let me ask you a question.

Romans 5:10 *If* while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

If God sent His Son to die for you and to bear all your guilt and sin and to endure the fiery wrath of God; and if He paid the full price to reconcile you to the Father who was your enemy; how much more will he not do for you in this life and in the life to come?

Leave here this evening in confidence assurance and absolute faith and full awareness of God's supreme love for all you who love His Son.

Prayer: Holy Father, greater love has no man than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends. Greater love has no God than this that you should send your Son to die for us. Thank you for the perfect and complete atonement Christ made for us on the cross and for His blood shed for our sins. You thought of everything, you appeased your just and righteous wrath, you satisfying your need for justice, paid the full debt owed, you received from Christ sufficient blood to cover all the sins of all the elect, you counted us righteous by the imputed righteousness of Christ and you declared us obedient to the law because of the perfect obedience of Jesus.

Receive our imperfect, and unworthy love and gratitude for your perfect and unfailing love and kindness shown to us in Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord. Amen.