

HOW ARE WE SAVED?

The Biblical Teaching of Justification by Faith Alone

I. The Source of Our Convictions

Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church confesses, along with all true churches of Christ throughout the ages, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone are the perfect source by which we know what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. The Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God.

II. The Biblical Teaching Concerning Salvation

God declares in John 3:17, “For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.” All Christians who acknowledge the divine authority of God’s Word agree that Jesus Christ is the Savior of His people, but there are various opinions as to the nature of His salvation and the means by which it is accomplished. The word salvation is used in many ways in Scripture. Salvation can mean healing from a disease; salvation from dangers; or deliverance from evil (moral or physical) etc. If this passage in John stood isolated from the rest of Scripture, we might misunderstand the nature of His salvation. The salvation of Jesus includes something higher and more difficult than reformation of the society. So in what sense is Jesus a Savior of His people?

Jesus’ mission on earth was to deliver believers from eternal damnation which is the natural consequence of sin against God. Jesus came to earth to give His people the blessing of eternal life (John 3:14-16^[1]). Only one person has lived on earth who can deliver us from our sins. Described as a savior in Scripture, Jesus delivers people from eternal death and gives them eternal life. God is just, He hates sin and punishes iniquity with eternal death. Jesus cannot be a savior without delivering His people from their sins.

All men in their natural state are totally averse all good and stubbornly inclined to all evil. We inherited from our first father, Adam, his corrupted nature which he brought upon himself. So all men are under sin (Romans 3:10-18^[2]; 5:12, 15-18^[3]). In his natural state man is totally depraved and at enmity with God (Romans 3:10-12^[4]; Psalm 51:5^[5]). God has reconciled man’s sinfulness with His requirement of moral perfection (1 Peter 1:15, 16^[6]). Every sin deserves God’s wrath and curse (Galatians 3:10^[7]; Ephesians 5:6^[8]). All sin deserves the eternal punishment of God (Matthew 25:41-43^[9]; Deuteronomy 28:15^[10]).

The only way the righteous God reclaims man is by removing the cause of his enmity to God. The enmity of man against God is caused by sin. In order to have assurance in the Lord, the saved sinner should understand that his sins have been taken away from him and paid in full. It is as if he has never sinned; he can stand on the same level as a person who has never sinned in his whole life. The saved sinner

must know that God is treating him as a just man. The way God does this is by imputing; i.e. attributing or reckoning the iniquities of the sinner to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, 21^[11]; Romans 5:12-21^[12]). The burden of the sinner is taken away and put on the shoulders of Christ. Christ's perfect obedience satisfied the penalty for all the sins of His people. Christ did not break any of God's laws (Hebrews 4:15^[13]). With Christ as the representative of believers, the penalties of the law have been met—Jesus paid the penalty for all the sins of God's people. Christ's perfect obedience to God's law is reckoned to the sinner as his own obedience. God's anger toward sin was appeased by Christ's suffering and death on the cross. Christ fulfilled all the demands of the Father (Hebrews 5:9^[14], 2:10^[15]). Through the imputed righteousness of Christ, God sees the believer's sin debt as paid in full. God views the believer as restored to the same level of purity as Adam before he had sinned (Romans 8:1^[16]; Romans 5:8-10^[17]). The obedience and suffering of Christ were absolutely vicarious (i.e., substitutionary). The Just died for the unjust.

The righteousness imputed to believers is not wrought by themselves in any way whatsoever (Romans 3:20^[18]; 4:2-3^[19]; Galatians 3:16^[20]). We are only justified in Christ (Acts 13:38-39^[21]; 2 Corinthians 5:21^[22]; 1 Peter 1:18-19^[23]). The instrument of our salvation and justification is faith. Scripture teaches that we are justified by faith alone (Romans 3:21-26^[24]; Galatians 3:16^[20]). However, faith is not the foundation of our salvation. The foundation of salvation is the righteousness wrought on our behalf by Christ.

Many churches proclaim Christ as foundational, but they do not profess Him as sufficient for our justification. Thus, for salvation they require works such as: certain modes of baptism; dietary restrictions; forms of dress; penances; symbolic rituals; and many other forms of obedience. These are extra-Biblical teachings of faith plus works. Through the ages the Protestant faith has taught that faith is the only instrument of justification. The believer looks in faith away from himself and rests completely upon Christ for salvation and his righteousness. With the Reformers and all Biblical Churches today we profess that we are saved Sola Fide (By Faith Alone); Soli Christo (Through Christ Alone); Sola Gratia (In Grace Alone).

Scripture References

All scripture texts are quoted from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

[1] **John 3:14-16**— ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

[2] **Romans 3:10-18**— ¹⁰ as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

[3] **Romans 5:12, 15-18**— ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.... ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the

trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

[4] **Romans 3:10-12**—“None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

[5] **Psalms 51:5**—Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

[6] **1 Peter 1:15, 16**— ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

[7] **Galatians 3:10**—For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

[8] **Ephesians 5:6**—Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

[9] **Matthew 25:41-43**— ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’”

[10] **Deuteronomy 28:15**—“But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

[11] **2 Corinthians 5:18-19, 21**— ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.... ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[12] **Romans 5:12-21**— ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[13] **Hebrews 4:15**—For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

[14] **Hebrews 5:9**—And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

[15] **Hebrews 2:10**—For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

[16] **Romans 8:1**—There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[17] **Romans 5:8-10**— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For 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.

[18] **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.

[19] **Romans 4:2-3**— 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.”

[20] **Galatians 3:16**—yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

[21] **Acts 13:38-39**— ³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything ³⁹ from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

[22] **2 Corinthians 5:21**—For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[23] **1 Peter 1:18-19**— ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

[24] **Romans 3:21-26**— ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his

righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.