**Foundations (42 of 60) Saving Faith - RC Sproul**

During the Reformation, a question arose regarding one of the core elements of Christianity. What is saving faith? That's our topic on Renewing Your Mind. Welcome to the Weekend Edition of Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R.C. Sproul.

For some time now, we've worked our way through a comprehensive 60-part series titled Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. Together, we're discovering that, far from being boring or abstract, systematic theology is a deeply practical and rewarding field of study. In today's lesson, Dr. Sproul explains the essential role faith has played in God's plan of redemption.

This study is titled Saving Faith, and our teacher is the founder and president of Reformation Bible College in Sanford, Florida. Here's Dr. R.C. Sproul. In our brief discussion of the doctrine of justification, the article upon which the church stands or falls, we saw how the controversy focused on the instrumental cause of justification, and the Reformers insisted that that instrumental cause is faith and faith alone.

Now, one of the great distortions of that struggle, in fact, a way in which the Roman Catholic Church is often slandered, particularly by Protestants who don't know any better, is that the difference between the two groups is stated this way, that Protestants believe that justification is by faith, and Catholics believe that it's by works, and that Protestants believe it's by grace, and Catholics believe it's by merit. And that's just simply a false distortion of the matter. The Roman Catholic Church insists upon the necessity of faith in order to be justified, and they call faith the foundation and the root and the initiation of justification, and you can't be justified without it.

However, it is not sufficient to justify us because there must also be the works. And so the difference is for the Reformers, it's faith alone. For the Roman Catholic view, it's faith plus works, at least the works of satisfaction in the case of penance.

It's also a distortion to say that the Reformers believed that justification was by grace alone, and the Roman Catholic Church was by merit alone. As we've already seen, the Roman Church did not believe that anybody can be justified unless they first receive the infusion of the grace of justification that comes through the sacraments. And so even though merit takes place, at least congruous merit, that congruous merit rests upon and depends upon grace for its original impetus.

And so the difference is that Rome believes in faith plus works of justification, and the Reformers believed in faith alone. Rome believes in grace plus merit in order to be justified, and the Reformers believed in grace alone. But because the controversy focused so much on this matter of faith, and because the New Testament speaks so often about believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, and faith is so central to the biblical religion that sometimes we refer to Christianity as the Christian faith.

There is a decided content that is to be believed that is part and parcel of our religious activity. And so at the time of the Reformation, the question that arose that received much attention was the question, what really is saving faith? Because people heard Luther teaching a doctrine of cheap grace where all a person had to do was say, well, I believe, and then they're transported into the kingdom of God. And this whole idea of justification by faith alone suggests to many people a thinly veiled kind of antinomianism that says, as long as I believe the right things, I can live any kind of ungodly manner that I prefer and still be saved.

So just as long as I believe the right things or affirm the right things. And we remember James' admonition that faith without works is dead. And we remember in James' epistle, he says in the second chapter, if a man says that he has faith but has no works, will that faith save him? And that is, will a faith that is a dead faith, a faith that is a barren faith, a faith that never yields any fruit, is that sufficient to be saved? And James answers the question very clearly that that kind of faith doesn't save anybody.

In fact, Luther said that the faith that justifies is what he called a fides viva, a living faith, a vital faith, a faith that inevitably, necessarily, and immediately begins to yield the fruit of righteousness. In fact, if that faith is without any yield of righteousness, it's not true faith according to Luther. In fact, Luther said that justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.

And so, if I can go back to my equation for the Roman Catholic Church, it was faith plus works equals justification. For the antinomian, it is faith alone that gives you justification minus works. For the Protestant Reformation, it is faith equals justification plus works.

That is, the works are the necessary fruit of true faith, but the works don't count towards God's declaration by which we are said to be just in His sight. They do not form any part of the grounds for God's decision to declare us righteous, where here they are an essential part of the grounds of justification. There's a huge difference there.

So again, the Reformers were faced with the question, what is faith made up of? What are the constituent elements of saving faith? And the Reformers spelled out especially three ingredients of saving faith, and I'll give you the Latin and then I'll explain it for you. The first one is called notitia, sometimes notae. The second is called assensus, and the third is called fiducia.

Now, this distinction has these things in view. The notitia refers to the content of faith, the information, that which is in fact believed. Some people say it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere.

That is as far away from Christianity as you can be, because Christianity says it matters eternally what you believe. The Bible doesn't just say, believe, and you can believe in Satan or you can believe in Baal or you can believe in anything you want. No, it's believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

That is, there is an object of faith, and that object is Christ. And there are certain things that we are required to believe about Christ, namely that He is the Son of God, that He is our Savior, that He has provided an atonement. There are certain information that must be believed.

And of course, part of the task of the first century Christian community was to declare that essential information to the world around the early church. Paul proclaimed the gospel. The preaching of the church was to communicate the bare essentials of the person and work of Jesus, and then call people to embrace that and to believe it.

But for them to believe, they had to have this information in the mind. So the first thing we say is that faith, saving faith, is not contentless. It has a content.

We'll call this the data. The second ingredient of saving faith is what they call the census, which comes over into English simply as assent, which is the intellectual affirmation of the truth of the data. If I said to you, do you believe that George Washington was the first president of the United States, and you said to me, yes, you would not be making a religious declaration in the sense that you were now relying by faith upon George Washington to be your Savior.

But if I asked you if you believed that he was the first president, I was asking whether intellectually you were prepared to affirm the truthfulness of the proposition that George Washington was the first president of the United States. Now when it comes to the gospel, there are certain elements, as we have already seen, of the data, and for a person can really trust in Jesus Christ, they have to believe that Christ indeed is the Savior, that He is who He claims to be. I mean, I can't have saving faith if I'm aware of what the Bible says Jesus did, but I in fact do not believe it intellectually.

I cannot assent to its truth. I think that it's a false report. I think the disciples were nuts or whatever.

I have now failed to meet the second step of saving faith. I have to be persuaded that it is true. And here's where many people struggle, because you're assaulted with doubts about the truth claims.

Do you really believe that Jesus came back from the dead? I doubt if anybody within the hearing of my voice believes that unequivocally, that is without a shadow of a doubt, because the next person who believes it the way the Apostle Paul believed it and the way the rest of the disciples believe it will probably be just as effective in turning the world upside down as they were. But we have been bombarded with skepticism and cynicism and all of that saying, oh, you don't really believe in a resurrection, you haven't seen it with your own eyes and so on. And so there may be that element of doubt mixed with your faith, and you become like Peter, Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

But there has to be a certain level of intellectual affirmation and conviction for a person to be saved. You can't just be totally convinced that it didn't happen. You have to be basically ready to affirm the truth of these things.

But then suppose you have these first two elements, both of which are principally intellectual in character. You understand the data, you have the information, and you're persuaded that the information is true. And I say to you, do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins? And you say, yes, I believe that, I affirm it's true.

Is that enough to save you? Well, what James tells us is that all that does is qualify you to be a demon, because even the devil knows that much. He says the devils believe and tremble. But it's one thing to give an intellectual assent to a body of propositions, to a creed or something else, and then it's quite another to put my personal trust in it.

I remember hearing Dr. Jim Kennedy going through the Evangelism Explosion presentation of the gospel and using an illustration where he had an empty chair in front of him, and he said to this person, do you believe that that chair is strong enough to hold you up? And the person looked at the chair and said, yes, I believe the chair is able to support my weight. And then Dr. Kennedy said, well, is that chair right now supporting your weight? And the person said, well, no. And Jim said, well, why isn't it? And the person said, because I'm not sitting in it.

It's one thing to say, I believe that that chair will support my weight. It's another thing to risk your posterior by sitting in it. And that's what we mean by fiducia, whereby one actually trusts in Christ for one's salvation.

I can say I believe in justification by faith alone, and yet still in my daily life and in my inner thinking really think that I'm going to get to heaven by my achievements or by my works or by my striving. And that's why it's easy to get the doctrine of justification by faith in your head. It's another thing to get it in the bloodstream, where you really fully and finally despair of ever trying to earn your way into heaven, and you cling to Christ and Christ alone by placing your trust in Him and only in Him for your salvation.

But there's another element to fiducia besides trust, and that is the element of affection. We talked earlier about the effectual calling of God the Holy Spirit to those who are in bondage to sin, and we said that faith is something that is the work of God. God creates faith within our hearts.

Without the work of the Holy Spirit on our souls, we would never come to this kind of saving faith, because the problem is that we are indisposed towards Christ. The reason why an unregenerate person will never accept Jesus or embrace Jesus or come to Jesus is because that person doesn't want Jesus. That person is fundamentally at enmity in his mind and in his heart to God and to the things of God.

And as long as I am hostile to Christ, I have no affection for Christ. Look at Satan. Satan knows the truth.

Satan could make an A on a systematic theology exam, a hundred percent. He knows the truth, but he hates the truth. He's utterly indisposed and disinclined towards the worship of God, because he has no love for God, no love for Christ.

And we are like that by nature. We're dead in our sin. We walk according to the powers of this world, and we imitate the lusts of the flesh.

And until God the Holy Spirit changes our heart from what the Old Testament calls a heart of stone, and a heart of stone is a heart without affection. It is not only a heart that is lifeless, but it is a heart that is loveless. It has no affection for Christ.

And when the Holy Spirit changes us and gives to us the gift of faith, what He does principally is He changes the disposition of our hearts, so that before we despised Christ, now we see the sweetness of Christ, now we see the loveliness of Christ, and now we embrace Christ, we choose Christ, we trust Christ, because now that faith that has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost includes affection, real affection for Christ. Now again, in this life, none of us loves Christ perfectly, but we couldn't love Him at all unless God the Holy Spirit had changed that heart of stone and made it a heart of flesh. So, these are the elements of saving faith.

Now, when we talk about conversion, that tends to be a more general term than regeneration. When a person is brought to faith by the Holy Spirit, that person undergoes a conversion. Their life turns around.

Now think of it. If you before had no faith, and now you have faith. If you before had no affection for Christ, and now you have affection for Christ, that literally makes all the difference in the world.

And your life will be turned around. And it's in that situation that we experience one of the immediate fruits of genuine faith that some people would include as part and parcel of genuine faith, and that is repentance. Although the Bible distinguishes repent and believe, really one's the flip side of the other because I cannot really have affection for Christ and embrace Christ until I recognize and acknowledge that I am a sinner and that I desperately need His work in my behalf.

And of course, repentance includes within it a hatred for my own sin. And that comes in contrast to the new affection that has been given to us for God and for the things of God. So now, I'm always disturbed when ministers say, come to Jesus and all your troubles will be solved.

My life didn't get complicated until I became a Christian, until I was converted. Because before I was a Christian, I walked to one drummer. My course that I followed was a one-way street.

Now I still am tempted by the course of this world, and yet there has been shed abroad in my heart a love and affection and a trust for Christ. And those two sometimes are in real conflict, and we have to go through that. In other words, we repent because we hate our sin, and yet part of us still loves our sin.

But true repentance involves a godly sorrow for having offended God, a genuine sorrow and a resolve to be rid of it and to flee from it and to grow away from it in Christ. Repentance does not mean victory over sin. If it required total victory over sin for you to be saved, nobody would be saved.

But repentance means a turning away, having a different view of it. Metanoia means a changing of the mind, where before I tried to rationalize my sin, I approved myself, I actually enjoyed and encouraged myself in the practice of these sins. Now I realize my sin is an evil thing, and I have a different mindset toward it.

It doesn't mean that I've conquered it, but my mind has changed and changed dramatically. Now, we'll see the fruit of works that flow from faith when we look at sanctification. In the meantime, let me talk about a couple of other results of true faith.

After immediately with justification comes adoption. When God declares us just in Jesus Christ, He adopts us into His household. His only true natural Son is Christ.

But Christ becomes our elder brother by way of adoption. Nobody's born into the family of God. You are by nature the children of wrath, not children of God.

God is not by nature your Father. The only way you can have God as your Father is if He adopts you. And the only way He will adopt you is on the coattails of His Son.

But when we put our faith and trust in Christ and rely on Him, God not only declares us just, but He declares us His sons and daughters by way of adoption. Finally, Paul tells us in the fifth chapter of Romans some of the other fruits of justification. The first verse of Romans 5, he says, therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Three things are mentioned quickly. First fruit of justification, peace, peace with God. We were enemies.

The war is over. The enemies have been reconciled. God has declared a peace treaty with all of those who put their faith in Christ.

And it's not a cold war. It's not an unstable truce where the first time we do something wrong, God starts rattling the sword. That peace is an eternal peace, a lasting peace, an unbreakable peace because it has been won by the perfect righteousness of Christ.

And because we have peace with God, the second thing follows immediately. We have access to Him. You see, God doesn't allow His enemies into an intimate relationship with Him, but once we have been reconciled through the cross and through Christ, we have access into His presence, and we have joy in the glory of who He is.

These are the first fruits of our justification. From the series called Foundations, an overview of systematic theology, you're listening to a message titled Saving Faith. This is the weekend edition of Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R.C. Sproul.

You can own the entire 60-message DVD collection called Foundations, including the message on saving faith that we heard today. The comprehensive series is the perfect accompaniment for a small group Bible study or a family devotional. As you heard today, Dr. Sproul has a persuasive and energetic teaching style, and he will make all of the topics of systematic theology accessible and memorable as you watch each classroom session.

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Dr. Sproul is the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, the home of Renewing Your Mind. Ligonier exists to bridge the gap between Sunday school and seminary by helping Bible students understand the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. We want to help people grow both intellectually and spiritually as they gain insight into the holiness of God.

I'm Lee Webb, and next weekend Dr. Sproul covers the topic of adoption and union with Christ, how great it is to be considered a child of God. Unfortunately, some people make statements like, we are all God's children, believer and non-believer alike. Next weekend you'll hear the different theological opinions on this subject explained.

Listen to Dr. R.C. Sproul right here on Renewing Your Mind.