**Biblical Foundations – Justification (Right Legal Standing Before God) pt.3**

**Justification Comes To Us Entirely By God’s Grace, Not On Any Account of Any Merit In Ourselves**- After Paul explains in Romans that no one will ever be able to make themselves righteous before God, he goes on to explain that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift.” (Romans 3:20-24) God’s **“grace”** means his **“unmerited favor.”** Because we are completely unable to earn favor with God, the only way we could be declared righteous is if God freely provides salvation for us by grace, totally apart from our work. (Ephesians 2:8-9) Grace is clearly put in contrast to works or merit as the reason why God is willing to justify us. God did not have any obligation to impute our sin to Christ or to impute Christ’s righteousness to us; it was only because of his unmerited favor that he did this.

**God Justifies Us Through Our Faith In Christ**- Previously in this section, we noted that justification comes after saving faith- Paul makes this sequence clear. (Galatians 2:16) Here Paul indicates that faith comes first and does so for the purpose of being justified. He also says Christ is **“to be received by faith”** and that God is the **“justifier.”** (Romans 3:25-26) Scripture NEVER says we are justified because of the inherent goodness of our faith, as if our faith has merit before God. It never allows us to think that our faith earns favor with God. Rather, Scripture says that we are justified **“by means of”** our faith, understanding faith to be the instrument through which justification is given to us, not an activity that earns us merit or favor with God. We are justified solely because of the merits of Christ’s work. (Romans 5:17-19)

But one may ask why God chose faith to be the attitude of heart by which we would obtain justification. Why could God not have decided to give justification to all those who sincerely show love? Or who shows joy? Or contentment, or humility, or wisdom, etc. Why did God choose faith as the means by which we receive justification? Apparently, because faith is the one attitude of the heart that is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves. When we come to Christ in faith we essentially say, **“I give up and I surrender! I can never do enough or live righteously enough on my own to be accepted as righteous in God sight.”** In this way faith is the exact opposite of trusting in ourselves, and therefore it is the attitude that perfectly fits salvation that depends not at all on our own merit but entirely on God’s free gift of grace. (Romans 4:16) This is why Reformers from Martin Luther on were so dogmatic in their insistence that justification comes by grace alone through faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9) However, many argue that James contradicts Paul. (James 2:24) It must be stated that James is using the word justified in a different sense from the way Paul uses it. The word has a range of meanings- Paul uses it in the sense **“to declare righteous”**, but James uses it in the sense **“demonstrate or show to be righteous.”** For instance, Jesus uses this word in the sense James does when condemning the Pharisees. (Luke 16:15) This interpretation of James 2 depends not only on the fact that **“to show to be righteous”** is an acceptable sense of the for the word justified but also on the consideration that only this sense fits properly in the context of James 2. (James 2:20-24) James’ larger concern in this section is to argue against those who say they have faith but show no change in their lives. (James 2:18) Simply put, **“good works”** give evidence that we have been justified, though these good works are never the basis for our justification.

The practical implications of the doctrine of justification by faith alone are very significant: **(1)** this doctrine enables us to offer genuine hope to unbelievers who know they could never make themselves righteous before God. **(2)** this doctrine gives us confidence that God will never make us pay the penalty for sins that have been forgiven on Christ’s merits. Of course, we may continue to suffer the ordinary consequences of sin and God may discipline us out of love if we continue to be disobedient, but God will never take vengeance on us for our sins and make us pay the penalty that is due for them. (Romans 8:1)