

“Abel’s Faith” – Hebrews 11:4

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Take a Bible and meet me in Genesis 4...

We will get to what Hebrews says about the story in Genesis 4 in a moment, but I want us to look once more at the story before we get there. While you turn there, let me remind you that we are looking at the story of Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain, and hoping to learn what it teaches us about the nature of saving faith. I summarized the lesson last week:

Saving Faith Justifies

This is a truth that is taught all over the place in Scripture, but we have not yet explained how we see the lesson in this story. So the story is worth a second look because this doctrine—the doctrine of justification through faith (apart from works)—is absolutely essential for a proper knowledge of the Gospel and the salvation of the sinner. And it was the primary doctrine that the church, by and large, forgot in the days of Martin Luther, which led to its recovery in the Protestant Reformation.

In a lecture he once gave on Galatians to an audience he had spoken to often on the subject of justification through faith in Christ alone, Martin Luther began,

“But it is because, as I often warn you, there is a clear and present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions. It is very necessary, therefore, that this doctrine of faith be continually read and heard in public. No matter how well known it may be or how carefully learned, the devil, our adversary, who prowls around and seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8), is not dead. Our flesh also goes on living. Besides, temptations of every sort attack and oppress us on every side. Therefore this doctrine can never be discussed and taught enough. If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time. But if it flourishes, everything good flourishes—religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions.”¹

Elsewhere, he wrote,

“The doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.”²

This was a shared conviction among the Protestant Reformers. For example, John Calvin summarized the same convictions when he states, “Wherever the knowledge of [this doctrine] is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion abolished, the Church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown.”³ And how did he define the doctrine?

“As all mankind are, in the sight of God, lost sinners, we hold that Christ is their only righteousness, since, by his obedience, he has wiped off our transgressions; by his sacrifice, appeased the divine anger; by his blood, washed away our stains; by his cross, borne our curse; and by his death, made satisfaction for us. We maintain that in this way man is reconciled in Christ to God the Father, by no merit of his

own, by no value of works, but by gratuitous mercy. When we embrace Christ by faith, and come, as it were, into communion with him, this we term, after the manner of Scripture, the righteousness of faith.”⁴

Indeed, the passing of time has shown us that “the preaching of this truth creates, reforms, and revives the church.”⁵ It is no small matter. It is central to the Gospel. It’s the primary distinction that separates us from Roman Catholics. So how does this text clarify this doctrine? Well, that’s why we are here to find out, isn’t it? So let’s look at the text. I’ll begin reading in verse 1 of Genesis 4. Follow along as I read. This is God’s Word...

“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.” (Genesis 4:1-5)

Now last week we considered various theories as to why Abel’s offering was accepted by God and Cain’s rejected. Genesis is very vague on this point, so different opinions abound. What we determined is that at the very least it had something to do with faith. How do we know this? Because of the writer of Hebrew’s commentary on this story. Let’s look at it once more. Flip to Hebrews 11 and I will show you a few things...

In verse 4, we read,

“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.” (Hebrews 11:4)

From this we determined last week that God accepted Abel and his offering because it flowed out of the man’s faith in God, while Cain and his offering was rejected because it was characterized by unbelief. We spent most of the second half of the sermon considering the folly of Cain’s unbelief. But what about Abel? What can we learn from him. That’s what I want to consider with you today...

Abel is the first to die in the Bible. But he is also the first person who, by faith, lives beyond the grave.⁶ And the writer of Hebrews reminds us that, somehow, he “*still speaks*.” The fact that he speaks in death is noteworthy because Genesis doesn’t record any of his words in life. Yet it too mentions him speaking, in some sense, in death. Genesis says that the blood of Abel was “*crying*” out to God. The assumption is that his blood, as with the blood of the martyrs who could come after him, is crying out for justice, retribution, and vindication (cf. Revelation 6:9-10). The writer of Hebrews will deal with that kind of speaking later, in chapter 12. In Hebrews 11:4, however, the focus is not on Abel speaking through his blood, but on Abel speaking “*through his faith*”. So what does Abel say to us through his story of faith? I’m glad you asked...

Most importantly, it seems to me, Abel’s story bears witness to the Gospel story.

Abel’s Story Is a Picture of the Gospel

In Abel we see a shadow of Christ. Both were righteous men who were killed unjustly for trusting in God. But, of course, there are differences. Jesus, “although he was murdered by the angry and jealous successors of Cain, was not like Abel, the helpless victim of sudden hate. His entirely voluntary sacrifice was both determined and approved by God.”⁷

In addition to this contrast, I really appreciate how Jon Bloom directs our attention to the Gospel in the story of Cain and Abel, while acknowledging yet another contrast.

“In the story, though we’d rather see ourselves as Abel, we are all Cain. We are all at one time cursed, ‘hostile to God’ and alienated from him (Rom. 8:7; Eph. 4:18). Abel, the first martyr of faith, is a foreshadowing of our Lord Jesus, whose ‘blood...speaks a better word than the blood of Abel’ (Heb. 12:24). For though Abel’s innocent blood cried out for justice against sin, Jesus’s innocent blood cried out for mercy for sinners. Abel’s blood exposed Cain in his wretchedness. Jesus’s blood covers our wretchedness and cleanses us from all sin (Rom. 7:24; 1 John 1:9).”⁸

In a very real sense then, the blood and faith of Abel points us to the Savior. But the focus in Hebrews 11 is definitely placed upon his faith. And from the testimony of Scripture we hear Abel speaking to us the truth that it is faith that pleases God. This is his testimony, even in death. And what a legacy it is. What will yours be?

“Think about it this way: what will be said at your funeral? What words are going to make up the content of your eulogy? How will your life be summarized in fifteen minutes of reflection? Hopefully, we will all leave the type of testimony left by Abel: though he was dead, his life bore witness to the grace and mercy found only in a substitutionary sacrifice. Christians should aspire to leave behind a legacy of faith. They should aspire to leave their eulogists a wealth of material that testifies to the saving power of Jesus Christ, just as Abel did. His faith testified to the greatness of Christ even beyond the extent of his life.”⁹

But the second thing that Abel testifies to us is that our justification is received freely through faith.

Abel’s Story Is a Picture of Justification Sola Fide

That means that justification is received through “faith alone.” It’s the recognition that a person “is right with God only by trusting (*sola fide*) in the righteousness of another, namely, in the sinless substitute, Christ Jesus, alone (*solus* Christus).”¹⁰ Surprisingly, the story of Genesis says nothing of Abel’s “faith,” yet that is what the writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sees. The Old Testament also never refers to Abel as “righteous,” yet that is the conclusion that the writer of Hebrews draws from his story. And there is a reason the writer looks at Abel and sees faith wed to righteousness. And it’s easy enough to see how he gets there when the context of Hebrews is accounted for.

Chapter 11 is one long illustration of Habakkuk quotation from the previous chapter—“*my righteous one shall live by faith*” (Hebrews 10:38; Habakkuk 2:4). The author presupposes, rightly, that “*without faith it is impossible to please [God]*” (11:6). It would appear that God takes pleasure in our obedience only when it is preceded by faith. “The wellspring of obedience is always an attitude of trust.”¹¹ So it stands to reason that if Abel’s offering pleased God, then it must have been offered in faith. When God accepted the offering, “God ‘bore witness’ (*martyreō*) on behalf of Abel, affirming that he was ‘righteous’ (cf. also Matt. 23:35; 1 John 3:12).”¹²

Likewise, Cain’s offering displeased God because it must have been offered without faith. The core sin of Cain, then, is the sin of unbelief. He didn’t trust God. And this unbelief is all it takes to spoil an offering and turn it into something evil (1 John 3:12). As Paul told the Romans, “*whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*” (Romans 14:23). And as he reminded the Galatians, “*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*” (Galatians 5:6; NIV). We would do well to learn this, lest we misjudge how the Lord sees our offerings and service. The story of Abel reminds...

“...people of every generation, not only about the quality of their offering to God, but also their motivation. Is the outward offering of worship, money and service a genuine expression of our love and commitment? God sees not only the value of the sacrifice, but the heart of the giver.”¹³

Hebrews 11:2 reveals that it is “*by faith*” that “*the people of old received their commendation.*” And what did that commendation consist of? According to verse 4, righteousness. Abel’s offering was the fruit of his faith and through his faith he was regarded as “*righteous.*” That’s why Jesus called him “*righteous Abel*” (Matthew 23:35). He believed God and was counted righteous, that is, regarded as having God’s approval, which is what is meant by the Christian term “justification.” As I said in the beginning, “saving faith justifies.” It’s no different for us than it was for Abel.

“How can sinful man be made right before a perfect God?...God gives His own righteousness and this meets all His demands for perfection. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, God made Jesus to be sin ‘so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’ And in Philippians 3:9, he shares that human beings actually can receive God’s perfect righteousness ‘through faith in Christ.’ Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, died to provide a perfect sacrifice, and thereby paid the perfect price to provide a transfer of the perfection God requires to sinful humanity...How does this transfer happen? How does God’s righteousness, the very thing we need most become ours? Paul explains by faith alone...”¹⁴

This is one of the “Five Solas” of the Protestant Reformation—*sola fide* (i.e., “faith alone”). This was shorthand for how a person is justified before God. We are saved through faith alone, not works. This is arguably the most central distinction between Protestants and Roman Catholics historically. Both affirm the necessity of faith in salvation. But Protestants insist that the sinner’s justification comes through faith *alone*, apart from any works or penance. Our good works are the fruit, not the root, of justification. Our good works are the “consequence” of salvation, but faith alone is the “condition” of it.¹⁵ As Paul states,

“We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;”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.” (Galatians 2:15-16)

We are justified—declared “not guilty” in God’s sight—by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This doctrine of justification, in the words of Johann Heinrich Alsted (1618), is “the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.”¹⁶ Get this wrong and you get the Gospel wrong. Get this wrong and you’ll end up aligned with Cain, not Abel. *Sola fide* is essential. “Through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—His atoning sacrifice and substitution on our behalf—we can have God’s righteousness. But this comes only through faith alone, the gift of God.”¹⁷ Not through works. Through faith alone.

Interestingly, it was Romans 1:17, where Paul quotes the same verse from Habakkuk that the writer of Hebrews does—“The righteous shall live by faith”—that opened Luther’s eyes to this doctrine of justification through faith alone.¹⁸ Describing the day this Gospel truth changed his life, he wrote,

“Though I was a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction [i.e., works of obedience and penance]. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinner, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God...

At last by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I have heeded to the context of the words [of Romans 1:17], namely, ‘In the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith....Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates....Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate of paradise.”¹⁹

Isn’t that an interesting way to describe his conversion? It was like passing through the gates of paradise. That’s exactly what conversion is like. Through faith in Christ we are credited with Christ’s righteousness and thereby can cross through the gates, through the cherubim (cf. last week’s sermon), into the presence of God. That’s the

glory of justification through faith alone. “We are not righteous by works, which declare our supposed merit—that was Cain’s mistake and the cause of his rejection—but by faith, which declares our need and our acceptance of God’s gracious gift.”²⁰ When Luther discovered this, he discovered the heart of the Gospel. He discovered and received what mattered most—the commendation of God, divine favor, justification in His sight, the divine verdict of “not guilty”—through faith (cf. Hebrews 11:2). And he dedicated the rest of his life to advancing the Gospel in his context. He would write that “if the article of justification be once lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost.”²¹

Luther learned that really there are two ways (and only two ways) to approach God. There is the way of Abel, the way of faith. And there is the way for Cain, the way of unbelief. The way of Abel leads to commendation. The way of Cain to condemnation. Those are the options: commendation through faith or condemnation through unbelief. There is no third way when we stand before God on the last day.²²

“We will be clothed, either in the so-called righteousness of our own making or in the glorious righteousness of Christ Jesus that has been granted to us ‘through Christ Jesus.’ Those are the two possibilities. And the so-called righteousness or goodness of our own making is worse than nakedness. It is filthy rags. It is a repulsive garment that brings only death and condemnation. Our only hope is to renounce our trust in anything other than Christ and his righteousness.”²³

When we try to approach God through our works, we are by necessity not approaching him through faith. We are making Cain’s error. “If you work for your justification, what you are doing is trying to put God in your debt.”²⁴ You are trying to make Him “owe you” so that you can say “I deserve saving.” But God is never our debtor. And this is the wrong approach. Richard Phillips conveys this truth masterfully when he writes,

“This means that you cannot come to God any way you choose. You do not just say you believe in God and then decide for yourself how you will draw near to him. That was Cain’s problem. He would decide the terms of his coming to God; he would offer a sacrifice according to his own devising. How bitter he was when God rejected him and his self-righteous worship.

There really are only two kinds of offerings, two ways to come to God—those that point to our own work, our own merits, our own righteousness, and those that point to Jesus Christ, crucified in our place to pay for sins. Unless we come to God confessing the guilt of our sin and our need for his grace, and embracing the gift of his own Son to die in our place, we reject the one way that he has provided. We then will be rejected, condemned for our sins, and made to suffer the eternal pains of hell.”²⁵

But, make no mistake about it, many people sitting in churches across the world this morning are making the same mistake. As James Montgomery Boice explained in his commentary on Genesis:

“That is the problem with so many ‘good, religious people.’ They come to God with their heightened sense of esthetics and want to be received by God because of their beautiful offerings. But God rejects them and their godless worship. There is no blood, no Christ and, hence, no true Christianity, however beautiful their service might be.”²⁶

Salvation always comes through faith, not works. We are commended by God as righteous through faith, not works. This is the biblical understanding of justification. This is key to understanding salvation in Christ. And the fact of the matter is that it has always been that way.

It would be natural for the original audience of Hebrews—after all these perilous warnings about falling away from Christ—to have wondered about all God’s people who came before Christ. They were likely thinking: “So what about Abraham? What about Moses? How were they included in this story of God’s grace to us in Christ?”²⁷ What the writer of Hebrews is showing them in chapter 11 is that they too received their salvation in exactly the same way—faith. As one commentator explains it,

“Paul makes this same point in Romans 4:1-12. Abraham was counted righteous before God because of his faith (see Gen 15:6). These passages demonstrate the consistent and clear New Testament teaching that the redeemed from Israel who lived before the death and resurrection of Christ were saved because they trusted God to be faithful to his promises. Their faith was a messianic faith. They had an assurance that they invested in the promises of God. They hoped in things yet unseen, in a deliverer that had been promised but had not yet come.”²⁸

So, yes, they lived before the Son of God came to earth to take up His cross, but that doesn't mean they were not looking ahead in faith to the promised Savior that God would send (e.g., Genesis 3:15). This side of the cross we see the promises culminating in Christ. They saw the shadows. We see the substance. But the same Savior is the object of the faith for every person who will be numbered among God's people in glory. Jesus is the Savior of all. As pastor and rapper Shai Linne put it years ago in one of his songs, “Before the cross, they were saved on credit; after they cross, we've been saved on debit.”²⁹

But how does this doctrine of justification help the Christian in life? We are saved because of the realities contained in this doctrine, but, once saved, how does the memory of it help us in the Christian life? There are more ways than we could possibly itemize today, so I'll simply point to a few in our remaining time. For the sake of time, I can only illustrate them in passing, drawing on the insights of others.

The Doctrine of Justification Sola Fide Can Fuel Our Assurance

How so? Well, one of the things that squashes our sense of assurance is our sin. We fail and imagine that God is done with us, that He has had enough, that we are no longer worthy of His mercy. But, friends, we never were. Here's how Sam Storm puts it,

“According to [Romans] 4:5, God justifies the ‘ungodly.’ God passed a favorable sentence on your behalf in full view of your moral failures, in full view of your shortcomings. God justified you with his eyes wide open. He knew the very worst about you at the time he accepted you for Jesus's sake. God didn't wait until you were ‘godly’ and then justify you on the basis of what you had achieved. He looked at you in full and exhaustive awareness of every sin you would ever commit, and because of what Jesus achieved, he declared you righteous in his sight.”³⁰

Do you see? Church, we were no more worthy of Christ's mercy and salvation on our best day as we were on our worst. We are made right in God's sight by Christ's work, not ours. We are justified, because His performance on our behalf is our only hope, not our performance on any given day.

“The only thing that will shatter the hard shell of hopelessness that so often envelops the human heart is the truth that God justifies the ‘ungodly’ (4:5). The paralysis of sin and shame is lifted with the realization that one stands before an infinitely holy God clothed in the very righteousness of that same God, a righteousness that this infinitely holy God freely bestows in response not to works or moral improvement or an impressive résumé but to simple faith in Jesus Christ... Each time an accusation is brought against you, Jesus turns to the Father and says, ‘I was reckoned guilty for that sin. I died for it. Your justice has been satisfied.’ Over and over and over and over again.”³¹

Amen, someone? Next...

The Doctrine of Justification Sola Fide Can Fuel Our Worship

John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, had a similar testimony to Martin Luther in some ways. Bunyan described himself as “ignorant of Jesus Christ, and going about to establish my own righteousness, and [would have] perished therein, had not God in mercy showed me more of my state by nature.” He goes on...

“One day as I was passing into the field...this sentence fell upon my soul. Thy righteousness is in heaven. And methought, withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul Jesus Christ as God’s right hand; there, I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, he wants [i.e., lacks] my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, ‘The same yesterday, today, and forever.’ Heb. 13:8. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons;...now went I also home rejoicing from the grace and love of God.”³²

Next,

The Doctrine of Justification Sola Fide Can Fuel Our Holiness

Again, the root of justification is not holy living. The root is faith alone. Holy living is the fruit. We pursue godliness not as a means of salvation, but as evidence of salvation. It is an act of worship that results from knowing that you have the approval of God in Christ, not a way to try to earn that approval. Holiness is the consequence, not the cause of justification by grace, through faith. The more we remember the grace we have been shown, the more motivated we will be to pursue holiness rightly. And that’s true for every aspect of holiness you can think of. Just take humility for an example...

“The doctrine of faith alone helps us cultivate humility, because it reminds us that salvation from God is a gift ‘so that no one can boast’ (Eph. 2:9).”³³

If the Gospel announces that “although we are sinners before our Creator God, he has acted in love to send his Son to live and die and rise again in our place so that if we put our faith and trust in him, we too will rise right along with him—first to newness of life and ultimately to life eternal”, then “every last piece of that message is a full-frontal assault on self-assurance.” Why? Because, as Greg Gilbert explains,

“...what he did for us was not a matter of working *with* us to pull us out of our predicament. It wasn’t a 50-50 cooperation between us and him, or even 90-10. What he did for us, he did *for* us, without our help or input or contribution.”³⁴

We believe. Christ’s righteousness is credited to our account freely, apart from works, all of grace. That’s the doctrine of justification *sola fide*. And remembering it can fuel our assurance, our worship, and our holy living.

But there is one final thing I want us to see that Abel’s says to us through his faith and it relates to the cost of faith. “As the first of many who ‘died in faith, not having received the things promised’ (11:13), Abel heads the chorus of witnesses who speak from Scripture’s pages, testifying that the God who promises is faithful (v. 11), even as their blood is shed (vv. 35-37).”³⁵ Therefore...

Abel’s Story Is a Picture of the Cost of Faith

This is a lesson that the Apostle John makes explicit.

“We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.” (1 John 3:12-13)

Indeed, Abel was the first to learn what Paul would later teach Timothy—“*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” (2 Timothy 3:12; cf. Luke 21:16-17). The cost may not be the same for us. But there is a cross to bear when we follow Christ. But take heart, Abel is part of a cloud of witnesses that

testifies to us—“Jesus is worth it.” So take heart. And remember—Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). And even here we see a picture of the Gospel. Matthew Barrett gets at it when he writes,

“From Adam to Cain, from the flood to Babel, and from Sodom to Israel’s exile, the history of humanity can be summed up concisely: in Adam, man strives to justify himself... Yet when all the world had gone astray, divine light shined bright into a dark madness. That light was none other than Jesus Christ (John 1:9; 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:3-6). Predicted by the prophets, foreshadowed in Israel’s array of types, the offspring of the woman had at long last arrived to redeem Adam’s fallen race. Finally, those in Adam could find redemption—in Christ, the last Adam... Unthinkable, however, was the *means* by which the Son of Man would accomplish such a salvation. The Lord of glory would be crucified (1 Cor. 2:8). He did not climb Babel into the heavens but descended from the heavens to endure the death Babel’s citizens deserved. To succeed in his Father’s eyes, he would have to fail in the eyes of the world.”³⁶

Brothers and sisters, would it really be any different for us? We must not be afraid to fail in the eyes of the world, when we are the objects of God’s affection in Christ.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:31-39)

Let’s pray...

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4* (ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C.

² Quoted in John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, vol. 3, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 3:174.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., drawing from John Dillenberger, *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings* (Saarbruecken: Scholars, 1975), 95.

⁵ Ibid., 3:175.

⁶ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 317.

⁷ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1982), 200.

⁸ Jon Bloom, *Things Not Seen: A Fresh Look at Old Stories of Trusting God’s Promises* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 146.

⁹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Exalting Jesus in Hebrews* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 172.

¹⁰ Matthew Barrett, “The Foolishness of Justification,” in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 23.

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (BTCP; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 344.

¹² Dennis E. Johnson, “Hebrews” in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 163.

¹³ Brown, 200.

¹⁴ Jason G. Duesing, “Faith Alone” in *Sola: How the Five Solas Are Still Reforming the Church*, ed. Jason K. Allen (Chicago: Moody, 61).

¹⁵ Sam Storms, “The Ground on Which We Stand: The Necessity of Justification for Pastoral Ministry,” in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 846. For an excellent illustration of this distinction, involving the comparison of a seed and pebble, see *Ibid.*, 848-849.

¹⁶ Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 448n.3.

¹⁷ Duesing, 63.

¹⁸ “In our contemporary culture we have little idea of the need to be declared righteous before a holy God, for we are dim to the majesty and holiness of God and therefore have a high estimate of ourselves. Yet Luther rightly understood these things. The majesty of God required man’s perfect obedience to the law, a perfection man could never render. To Luther, therefore, the issue of justification by faith alone was *the* issue of the day.” Charles E. Fry, *A World Upside Down: Four Essays on the Life and Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Cruciform Press, 2015), 51.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Complete Edition Luther’s Latin Writings” (1545), in Lull and Russell, eds., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 496-497 *LW* 34:336-338; also cited in Duesing, 67-69.

²⁰ Phillips, 406.

²¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), 151 (accessed via the “Middleton” version, Logos Bible Software). Similarly, Matthew Barrett writes, “To abandon justification *sola fide* and the free imputation of Christ’s righteousness to those who believe is to forfeit the gospel itself (Gal. 1:6-9)” (Barrett, 34). John Calvin described justification as “the first and chief article,” stressing that “unless you understand first of all what your position is before God, and what the judgment which he passes upon you, you have no foundation on which your salvation can be laid, or on which piety towards God can be reared” (*Ibid.*, 35).

²² Mohler, 170.

²³ Storms, 843.

²⁴ Piper, 3:180.

²⁵ Phillips, 405.

²⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis*, vol. 1, *Creation and Fall* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 201. He continues, “If one comes first through faith in Christ and his shed blood, then he can present all the beautiful things he is capable of finding or creating. And God will be pleased by this, because the person does not trust these things for salvation but rather is offering them to God just because he loves him and wants to show affection. It is only on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ that one can come.” *Ibid.*, 202; also cited in Phillips, 405.

²⁷ Mohler, 171.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ “Random Thoughts 3” from his album, *Still Jesus*.

³⁰ Storms, 860.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 852, 859.

³² John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666; repr., Hertfordshire, UK: Evangelical Press, 1978), 20.

³³ Duesing, 72.

³⁴ Gilbert, 31, 35-36. You say, “Well, isn’t our faith a kind of work?” No. Faith is “complete trust or confidence in someone or something,” or simply, “reliance” Gilbert is helpful here as well: “To have faith is, at its root, to rely on something we believe is reliable. Now if that’s true, then by definition, faith can have no virtuous quality in itself. It cannot stand alone; in fact, it comes into being only when it leans on or relies on something else. It is, considered in itself, fundamentally empty” (*Ibid.*, 41). Then he offers a helpful illustration of this: “Faith is like a hand; it grasps other things as it trusts and relies on them, whether those things are people or bank accounts or superstitions or even Christ. When we have faith in something, we are reaching out and taking hold of it in trust. What follows from that, though, is that faith, like a hand, is empty until it takes hold of something else. The fact is, there’s nothing inherently good or bad, virtuous or blameworthy in simply grasping; whether the grasping is good or bad depends entirely on what is grasped. If you’re stumbling, it’s good to grasp a handrail but it’s not good to grasp a hot stove! Well, in the same way, there’s also nothing inherently good or bad in simply trusting; it depends entirely on the object of our trust. So, here’s the fundamental reality faith is empty of goodness or badness until it takes hold of something else... There’s no such thing as a good or acceptable faith, only a good or acceptable *object* of faith. The value of your faith isn’t in the faith itself; it’s in *what that faith is trusting*.” *Ibid.*, 41-42.

³⁵ Johnson, 163.

³⁶ Barrett, 24-25.