



Have you ever heard anyone say the Bible is a “rule-book” or a guide for “good living?” While the Bible is our guide there is more to it than simply being a rulebook. The catechism asks: **“How is it possible for a just and holy God to declare sinners righteous (justification)? God declares sinners righteous for Christ’s sake; that is, our sins have been imputed or charged to Christ, the Savior, and Christ’s righteousness has been imputed or credited to us”** (Small Catechism, Q. 206, pg. 209, CPH, 2017 ed).

The central doctrine of Scripture is **“justification by faith.”** Faith is God’s gift by the merit and work of Christ our Savior. The Catechism also notes on page 209: *“When our sins were charged to Christ, He suffered the full penalty for them in our place. He rose again and now lives to all eternity in order to give us His righteousness... “Our righteousness before God is this: God forgives our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit, or worthiness of ours preceding, present, or following. He presents and credits to us the righteousness of Christ’s obedience [Romans 5:17-19]. Because of this righteousness we are received into grace by God and regarded as righteous”* (Formula of Concord; Epitome III 4).

The most important teaching of Scripture is to reveal Christ and that we are justified before God through Christ’s work of redemption. In Christ, we are given forgiveness of sins and where there is forgiveness there is life and salvation. God’s love for sinners is that He sent His Son to be our Savior (**St. John 3:16**). This teaches us not to rely on ourselves in our thoughts, emotions or works because we are unable to bring ourselves to faith or merit favor with God. The doctrine of **“justification by faith”** assures us that for the sake of Christ, God always keeps His promises. Further, we learn that the precious blood of Jesus is the full and complete atonement for sin. Nothing is left to chance, not our merit or worthiness; we can add nothing because Jesus is the priceless treasure who gives Himself as the sacrifice for sin. The Gospel is given to us in the spoken Word and water in our Baptism as we are made God’s own. We also receive forgiveness in The Lord’s Supper which gives blessings from the cross. No matter

what sin, or how much we have fallen short of the righteousness of Christ; forgiveness of sins is given, and we receive eternal life in Christ.

The misinterpretation that the Bible is primarily a “book of rules” places the focus on obedience to Christ as a matter of greatest importance and falsely teaches that our works contribute to salvation. The Bible teaches, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith” Eph. 2:8-9.** Christ obeyed the Law of God, because we are unable, and gives us His righteousness. **“For our sake He {God} made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him {Christ} we might become the righteousness of God” 2 Corinthians 5:21.** Jesus gives Himself as the sacrifice for our sin because we could never pay for our sin. **“He {Jesus} was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” Romans 4:25.** Through Christ we are justified and made heirs to the promises of God.

Yes, we are called to do good works, that God prepared for us to do (**Eph. 2:10**), to serve our neighbor, to God’s glory. Good works flow from faith, by God’s grace, done in gratitude for all His mercy in Christ. Yet, good works do not earn forgiveness nor win salvation. God’s mercy forgives through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, the central and most important teaching of Scripture is **“justification by faith”** because Christ pays for sin in full by His death. This teaching is central in the Scriptures because it separates Christianity from all false religions that teach salvation by good works. Furthermore, the teaching of **“justification by faith” in Christ**, gives great comfort to sinners troubled by their sin while showing God’s Divine mercy in Christ. As a result, our faith is founded on Jesus alone who reconciles us to God by His death and resurrection. The hymn writer beautifully expresses **“justification by faith”** as He pens:

I know my faith is founded	On Jesus Christ, my God and Lord;
And this my faith confessing,	Unmoved I stand upon His Word.
Man’s reason cannot fathom	The truth of God profound;
Who trusts her subtle wisdom	Relies on shifting ground.
God’s Word is all sufficient,	It makes divinely sure,
And trusting in its wisdom,	My faith shall rest secure.

TLH 381 “I Know My Faith Is Founded” v 1.

In Christ, Pastor Ahrendt