

Justification By Faith Alone

Lord's Day 23

By Rev. Andrew Lanning

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Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church
1945 84th Street SW
Byron Center, MI 49315

Website: www.byronprc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/byroncenterprc

We turn in God's word this evening to Romans 3. Romans 3. I read this in connection with Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Romans 3.

1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? 2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. 3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? 4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. 5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) 6 God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world? 7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? 8 And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. 9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; 10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. 13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: 14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood: 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways: 17 And the way of peace have they not known: 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes. 19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. 21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and

come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. 27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. 29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: 30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. 31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

This is God's word, holy and inspired and infallible. May he bless it to our hearts this evening.

On the basis of that passage and many others, we have the instruction of our Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 23.

Q. 59. But what doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this?

A. That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life.

Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?

A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

Q. 61. Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?

A. Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, the doctrine of Lord's Day 23 and Romans 3 is the doctrine of justification by faith alone and that doctrine of justification by faith alone is a very precious truth to the child of God and to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a very precious truth to the child of God because that doctrine of

justification by faith alone stands over against that awful, damning testimony of my conscience that I hear even now, may you hear even now, that says to us in the light of the law, "You have failed. You have sinned. You have come short of the glory of God and you're going to continue failing." And when my conscience as it says to me right now says, "You have failed," and the truth of the Gospel rings out in my soul, but Christ has not failed. Christ has obeyed and Christ has covered all your failure and all your sin and all your coming short of the glory of God. He's measured up. He's measured up completely, and that perfect righteousness of Christ God counts as yours. I'm in heaven when I hear that. I'm before the throne of God in glory when I hear that. That truth of justification is so precious to me and to believers.

The truth of justification by faith alone is precious to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ as well. The church that confesses justification by faith alone is a true church. The church that denies justification by faith alone is a false church. It's that serious. When it comes to this doctrine of justification by faith alone, the Reformers called this doctrine the article of the standing or the falling of the church. The church that believes and confesses justification stands. The church that denies it or teaches justification by faith and by works and by man's worth and by this, that and the next thing, falls. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ desires to honor Jesus Christ by this confession of justification by faith alone and this is the word of the Gospel not only but the heart of the Gospel that comes to us tonight, the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and obedient and risen as your righteousness and as my righteousness. In fact, notice how that Gospel comes to us in Romans 3 tonight. Romans 3 shuts our mouths. Romans 3 creates a dead silence in the church, and Romans 3 does that by stopping the mouth, my mouth and your mouth and everyone's mouth, who wants to clamor for how good we are and how much good we have done. The word of God in Romans 3 says, "There is none that doeth good. No, not one," quoting the Old Testament.

"There is none righteous, no, not one. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable." That's the word that is spoken to you and to me. Don't clamor about how good you are and how much good you have done, and let me not clamor about how much good I have done. Every mouth is stopped and into that silence, that guilty silence comes the beautiful truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, your righteousness and my righteousness so that you and I are built up not in ourselves but in our Savior, and stand before God not in our merit and worth which is none but in the merit and worth of the Lord Jesus Christ who is everything.

So tonight we open up and hear this precious Gospel truth of justification by faith alone and that's the theme of the sermon, "Justification By Faith Alone." In the first place, consider the doctrine; in the second place, consider the controversy that always swirls around the doctrine of justification; and in the third place, consider the implications of justification by faith alone. Justification by faith alone: the doctrine, the controversy and the implications.

Let us begin, then, with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. What is justification? Here it is in a simple a definition as we can think of: justification is the gift of being right

with God. Now there's all kinds of things that have to be added to that but justification is the gift of being right with God and that's the way the Heidelberg Catechism talks about this truth of justification, it's being right with God or righteous before God. Notice that in Answer 59, "What doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this? That I am righteous before God." And then Question 60, "How art thou righteous before God?" That's the way Romans 3 speaks about justification as well. In verse 20 it speaks of being justified in God's sight.

And so when we speak of justification, we're speaking of being right with God, with being righteous before God, righteous in the sight of God, which means that in justification we stand before the throne of God himself and the question for us before that throne of God himself is, "How shall I be right with him? Right before him? Right in his eyes?" And it's quite something to be right or righteous with God and righteous before God. To be right with God means that we measure up to the standard that God has given to us and that standard is strict. There is no earthly law as strict as the standard of God's law. There is no Executive Order that is as strict as God's law. God's law and God's standard is, "Love me with all that you have, your heart, your mind, your soul, your strength. Everything. And do that every moment. Your whole being must be pressed into the service of my love. And love your neighbor as yourself, perfectly, so that never is there an evil thought about your neighbor, never is there an unrighteous word about your neighbor. Love me perfectly and love your neighbor as yourself." That's the standard to measure up to, to be right with God, right in his eyes so that when he looks at us, he says, "This one measures up."

Being right with God is deeper than measuring up to the standard of God's law. Being right with God means measuring up to God. It's not merely some external code, some set of rules, some law that God has given us and says, "Here's a rather arbitrary list for you to measure up to." Not at all. The standard is God himself and that's the language both of Romans 3 and the Heidelberg Catechism, justified in his eyes or righteous before God, and that means measuring up to the very being of God himself. That's what it is to be righteous. That's what it is for God to be righteous. For God to be righteous means that he measures up to himself; that every single thing he thinks, says, decrees, does, measures up to his own holy being and that's an awesome being, that's a perfect being. God is the one enthroned in the heavens. No man can even look on him, so bright is his glory and so perfect is his being. He's the God who's surrounded by creatures who are themselves holy, the holy angels, and to see a holy angel as that holy angel is can be terrifying for us creatures of the dust. The angels have faces like a man, like a bull, like an eagle. They have wings. Their bodies look like they're on fire with hot embers running all up and down their bodies. They're swift. They can be wherever they want at the speed of thought. The angels are awesome creatures and those awesome creatures before God cover their faces, so holy is God. To be right with God means that we measure up to the very being of the one before whom the angels bow and cover their faces. That's righteousness before God. That's being justified in his eyes and that's the gift that God gives in justification. He makes us right with himself. He makes us righteous before him. He justifies us in his eyes.

And now as if that were not deep enough, Romans 3 says that this righteousness that is given to us is God's own righteousness. Verses 21 and 22, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." The gift of righteousness is the gift of God's own righteousness. That's what he gives in justification so that when his eyes fall on us, he sees himself. And when he judges us before his throne, he says, "Your righteousness is equal to me, equal to my righteousness because it's my own righteousness that I have revealed and given to you." What a precious truth for the child of God who knows his sin and misery, God justifies me, granting to me his own righteousness before him.

That's the essence of justification but we have to continue to build that truth up and add the other parts of that truth that are also essential to justification. When we speak of being justified before God and receiving the righteousness of God, that righteousness of God that we receive is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the ground and the foundation of our justification. God gives that gift of his own righteousness to us for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is righteous, and now let's go to that heavenly throne again where God is and where the angels cover their faces, and let's see what happens when Jesus himself stands before that throne of God. The Lord Jesus Christ measures up to God. He measures up to God in himself. God does not have to take his own righteousness and bestow it on the Lord Jesus Christ as something that Jesus Christ doesn't have by nature. That's the way God justifies us, he gives us a righteousness we don't have. But not for the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ stands before God, he measures up. He is right with God. He is right with God with regard to every single thing God told him to do. Obey the law. Christ did it. Die on the cross for our sins. Christ did it. Rise from the dead the third day. Christ did it. Everything that God gave Jesus Christ to do, he accomplished perfectly. He measures up to God. He's in harmony with God's own being, being himself God, the second person come in our flesh.

The Lord Jesus Christ according to his human nature too is perfectly righteous and measures up to God. That's the righteousness that God gives to us, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Paul is explaining in Romans 3, "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Well, what is that righteousness of God that the law and the prophets witnessed of? "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." Verse 24, we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." We read of the Lord Jesus Christ throughout this passage as the righteousness of God and as the one through whom we receive the righteousness of God. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is not, first of all, the doctrine, then, about how you and I measure up to God, how you and I can be right with God, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is, first of all, the truth of how the Lord Jesus Christ is right with God and how he measures up to him. All our righteousness, then, must be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another element of the truth of justification by faith alone is that God gives us this righteousness of Christ by imputation. It is a gift of God. It is a gift of God freely given. The Catechism speaks of that in Lord's Day 23 when it says, "God grants to me." To grant something is to give something. God grants to me the perfect righteousness of Christ. God grants that righteousness of Christ to me by imputing it, and that's the word the Catechism uses as well. He grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction of Christ.

That word "impute" means he legally reckons and counts it as mine. This word "impute" is not the word "infuse." Justification is not that God puts something in my heart that enables me to do something so that I may be right with God. That's Rome's doctrine of justification. Justification for Rome is that God graciously, they say, puts the righteousness of Christ in my heart. He makes my heart a good thing and then by that good heart that I now have, I obey and do the works God has commanded, and by that obedience done only by the power of Christ in me, I am righteous before God. Those works of mine that I've done by his power are my righteousness. That's not it. That's not the truth of the Reformed faith and that's not the truth of Romans 3. Justification is not this, that we've been made good so that we can do good. The truth of justification is that God counts something that is not mine, the righteousness of Christ, as mine and by that imputation makes it mine so that I measure up to God. Not because of anything that I've done but because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, it's his righteousness that is my righteousness before God.

The Catechism identifies what it is that God imputes to us. God imputes to me the perfect satisfaction of Christ. The perfect satisfaction of Christ is his covering of all my sins in his blood. The perfect satisfaction of Christ is what happened on the cross. Christ atoned for my sins. Romans 3 speaks of redemption. Romans 3 speaks of propitiation. Those are all part of the same concept and the same truth of Christ's satisfaction. To measure up to God, every single one of my sins has to be paid for and covered. The Lord Jesus Christ did that by his cross and that satisfaction that he performed is credited as mine.

The Catechism also says that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to me, and that is Christ's measuring up in everything. He measures up to the being of God and the standard of God. That perfect measuring up, that perfect righteousness is imputed to me.

And the Catechism says the perfect holiness of Christ is imputed to me in justification, and the perfect holiness of Christ means all of his perfect obedience all his life long. From the moment of his conception and birth to the moment of his death and resurrection, he was a holy man and is now in heaven a holy man. The Lord Jesus Christ obeyed God's law with a perfect heart. All of that holiness of obedience and of being, of his actions and of his heart, all of that holiness is counted as ours so that it's not just this, my sins don't appear in heaven before God in justification but it's this, I'm credited with everything Jesus Christ did and am declared righteous before God for everything Jesus Christ did. That's justification by faith alone.

Another component of this doctrine and truth of justification by faith alone is that it's by faith and by faith alone. Justification by faith. The Catechism emphasizes that. "How art thou righteous before God? Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ." And then Question 61, "Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only?" To be justified by faith means that we receive this declaration of our righteousness for Jesus' sake through faith, that we have this imputed righteousness through faith, describing that bond and union to the Lord Jesus Christ so that what is true of him is true of his church and his people. Justification by faith alone is simply another way of saying justified by Christ alone. That's what justification by faith alone means, justification by Christ alone. The important thing about justification by faith alone is not that faith is worthy. Faith is not worthy. Our believing, our trusting, our knowing, our embracing is not worthy. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy. Justification by faith alone means that our justification is entirely the righteousness of Christ and not at all in any shape or form my righteousness or my merit or my contribution or my cooperation. It's nothing of me but only of Christ.

That's the way the Catechism emphasizes it when it says in Question 61, "Why sayest thou that thou art righteous by faith only? Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith, but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God; and that I cannot receive and apply the same to myself any other way than by faith only." And the Catechism gets that emphasis on Christ which is what justification by faith means, from Romans 3 and other passages. Romans 3 says that the righteousness of God given to us is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. Verse 24, we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And Jesus Christ "God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." Justification by faith alone simple means all my righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It means, then, that my works do not contribute in any way to my being right before God. Nothing that I do contributes to my being right before God. In fact, when I stand before God and am in his eyes, faith refuses to work. It will not work. Faith does not look to anything that comes of it but to the Lord Jesus Christ alone. In fact, faith's confession before God is, "I am ungodly. I am ungodly." That's Romans 4, that God justifieth the ungodly, verse 5. God justifieth the ungodly. That's how little we contribute to our righteousness with God. We stand before his eyes with the confession, "There is nothing good here that I can offer to thee to measure up and to be right with thy holy being. I plead something entirely outside of me. I plead the righteousness of Christ, his holiness, his satisfaction, his obedience, that counted as mine, as my righteousness before God."

That's justification by faith alone. How precious. How precious. This is what that truth of justification by faith alone means for you and for me who right now in this moment stand before God, the roof of the church building is whiffed away and the heavens are peeled back, and there is God's throne and there are Jehovah's eyes that look upon you. Romans 3 speaks of those eyes of Jehovah, those eyes of Jehovah see everything. There's a lot here that you don't see and that I don't see, there's a lot about me that you don't see and a lot about you that I don't see, but Jehovah's eyes see it all and here we are before that holy God on his throne in heaven with the angels trembling before him. And as we stand before God, our conscience has something to say. The Catechism speaks of the testimony

of our conscience and that testimony of that conscience is true in light of the law. Here's the testimony of the conscience: my conscience accuses me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil. I have grossly transgressed. Amen, that's true. I have grossly transgressed. I have kept none of them. Amen, that's true. I have kept none of them and I'm going to do it again though I don't want to, but I'm going to do it again because I'm still inclined to all evil. That's who I am by nature. That's who I am before the law of God, condemned.

And now it's your turn to stand up in that line of those who stand before that throne of God, and as you're about to stand up and take your turn before the throne of God, you see that God has on his lap a book, a thick book, hundreds and hundreds of pages, and you catch a glimpse of a page of that book and it's a sin that you committed and you know that whole book is full of all of your sins, every single one of them, and now you are to stand before God and see if you measure up? And as you take your place before that throne of God, God lifts up that book with all your sins in it, and you see written on the cover of that book a name and it's not your name. It's not your name, it's the name of your Savior, Jesus Christ. And God says to the Lord Jesus Christ, "I see you have transgressed my law. I see you have broken all my commandments." And we say, "It wasn't him. It wasn't him who did those things. It was me who did all of those things." But God says, "My judgment is right. The Lord Jesus Christ is your head and he represents you and I count every evil that you have done as his, and I curse him for it and send him to the cross for it, to bear the satisfaction of all of those sins." That's justification by faith alone, standing there before the throne of God.

Then there's more, what's more is that you see another tome on the lap of God, and you catch a glimpse of that page, and on that page is all of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, every good thing he ever did, every obedience not just that men could see but every obedience in his very heart. All of his perfect holiness is written there and God lifts up that tome and you see the cover of that book and written on the cover of that book is your name. Your name. And God says, "I see that you have obeyed perfectly." We know that's not us. We haven't done any of it. The Lord Jesus Christ did all of it and God counts that perfect righteousness as ours.

That's the language the Catechism uses to describe that truth. God counts or grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, even so as if I never had had any sin, nor committed any sin, yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me. That's justification by faith alone. We're right with God before his throne for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. Precious truth and every time your conscience accuses you anew that you have not obeyed, go stand before God's throne and catch a glimpse of those tomes and see whose name God has written on those tomes and all of that is only to say this: go catch a glimpse of your Savior and the Gospel and his perfect righteousness and be confident and sure that your sins are forgiven and his righteousness is yours. Justification by faith alone.

That truth of justification by faith alone is precious to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore the truth of justification is constantly assaulted by the enemy. The truth of

justification is always the subject of controversy from the beginning of the world until now and will be until the end of the world. In fact, the second false doctrine that ever came into the world was the false doctrine of justification by works, of being right with God by works. The first false doctrine that ever came into the world is that the word of God is not trustworthy. When the devil said to Eve, "Yea, hath God said? Do you think God's right in what he said? God lied to you. God knows that in the day that you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you'll be like God, knowing good and evil yourself."

That was the first false doctrine, that the word of God is not trustworthy. The second false doctrine that ever came into the world is that we are justified by our works, we're restored to righteousness before God by our works, and that is after Adam and Eve had fallen, they knew that they were naked, they sewed for themselves aprons of fig leaves to cover themselves. "We will be right in the eyes of God by our work. We will provide for us the measure and the standard to be right with God. If we just cover ourselves, if we can just make a big enough apron, we will be right with God." And that false doctrine of justification by works has continued in the world ever since then. God showed that that was false doctrine. God took away those aprons of leaves. He discarded them. He took them off Adam and Eve. He said, "Those don't cover you at all. I cover you. I alone cover you. It will require the blood of a sacrifice." He gave them coats of animal skins to clothe themselves. God covered them.

God is the one who made them right before him through the sacrifice of his only begotten Son, but that false doctrine of justification by works or justification by faith and works has continued. What was the very next generation? Adam and Eve, then Cain and Abel. What did Cain bring to God? He brought his work. He knew better. Abel showed that they knew better. Abel brought the blood of a lamb. Atonement is needed for us to be right with God. Cain knew that but Cain didn't bring atonement, Cain brought his work. He sweated, he labored in the field tearing out the weeds and the thorns and bringing out of that ground a crop. He brought the fruits of his labors to God and said, "Here is my righteousness before thee, God." And God had no respect unto Cain nor unto his sacrifice. God showed again justification by works is false. It's the lie.

Throughout the Old Testament, every time one of the saints tried to take his salvation into his own hands and bring to pass God's promise of the seed who would crush the head of the serpent whether it was by Abraham by marrying Sarah's handmaid, or whether it was Jacob in putting rods and strakes before the faces of the animals, whenever a man in the Old Testament would try to take his salvation through Christ into his own hands, that was essentially this lie of being right by man's work.

That was the error that continued into the New Testament. The Pharisees sought to establish their righteousness by their works. "I thank thee, God," prays the Pharisee in Jesus' parable, "that I am not like that publican, for I fast often, I tithe more than the law even requires of me, I do so many good things." He prayed that as his righteousness before God and he did not go down to his house justified, only the publican did who beat

on his breast and counted himself an ungodly man and said before God, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner."

Jesus did battle with the Pharisees who taught justification by works and the apostles, too, had that battle to fight against the Judaizers who taught that our righteousness and salvation is by our works, so that Paul's writing here in Romans and especially in Galatians, takes on that error, takes on that lie, and says we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. His obeying the law does not contribute to his righteousness and is not his righteousness. His righteousness is only the righteousness of God which is given him through faith in Jesus Christ.

And that battle has continued through all of the history of the church. There was the battle at the time of the Reformation with Rome teaching that justification is by faith and works and the Reformers to a man teaching that justification is by faith alone without the works of man. That battle had its place even in the Arminian controversy in the Netherlands, for the Arminians, too, taught that we are right with God because of the worthiness of our faith; that God takes our faith and says, "That's good enough. I'll take that in place of perfect obedience to the law," which is not at all the righteousness of the child of God before God but the righteousness of Christ only. That's the error that still is prevalent today in the world, even in Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the federal vision which teaches justification by faith and works, and which lie Reformed and Presbyterian churches have tolerated for years in their midst.

This truth of justification by faith alone is controversial which means that it is not enough for the church of Christ to say justification is by faith, or even justification is by faith alone. The Reformed church must also expose the lie of justification by faith and works and condemn that lie when that lie appears. That's something that we all vow to do at our Confession of Faith and the second question asked includes this, "Do you promise to adhere to this doctrine and to reject all heresies repugnant thereto and to lead a new godly life?" Our Confession of Faith is not merely this, we will positively confess the truth, our Confession is also this, we will repudiate the lie and reject every heresy repugnant to that truth. That's the vow that office-bearers take upon them in the formula of subscription. Not only do office-bearers vow, "I believe the doctrine of the Confessions and will uphold the doctrine of the Confessions," but office-bearers also vow, "I will exert myself to keep the church free from error against that doctrine." The confession of justification by faith alone is not finished when the church says, "We believe justification by faith alone." That confession is finished when the church also points to the lie and says, "That's heresy. That's the lie. That's repugnant to the truth of justification and we will not have it."

That's the first thing we mean when we talk about the controversy regarding justification. This truth is always controversial from the beginning of the world until now, and therefore the church must expect this controversy and the church must be armed to battle this controversy and fight against the heresy repugnant to it. The second thing we mean when we say that there is controversy is that God himself engages in controversy with the church on earth that does not teach justification by faith alone, or that teaches it but also

tolerates the lie against it. God has controversy with the church that will tolerate justification by works. God announces his controversy against the church that tolerates justification by works when he says in Galatians 1, for example, through the Apostle Paul, "If anyone teach any other gospel unto you than this gospel of justification by faith alone, let him be accursed." Even if it's an apostle, let that apostle be accursed. Even if it's an angel from heaven, let that angel from heaven be accursed. God himself comes and curses the church that impenitently tolerates justification by works, or the teacher that impenitently teaches justification by works, and if I ever teach you justification by works, you must say to me, "Reverend Lanning, let you be accursed. Repent of your sin and let you be accursed."

What is that controversy that the Lord pursues with a church that tolerates justification by works? It is this: he has no respect unto them or unto their offering. It's the same controversy he had with Cain. He didn't justify Cain. Cain was not righteous before God. That's how God fought Cain. That's how he fights the church that tolerates it. Let him be accursed is the same thing as not justifying that church so that that church in her generations is not justified, is not righteous before God. The children and the grandchildren and the great grandchildren are condemned by God.

Beloved, do you hear this? Do I hear this? Do you and I hear this as the denomination and a congregation as part of a denomination that taught justification by works? Do you and I hear this as a number of a denomination that tolerated justification by works? And that is not merely my judgment of the case, that is not wild-eyed language. A Protestant Reformed synod declared that on this very Lord's Day, Lord's Day 23, the doctrine of justification by faith alone was compromised, and what that means is we tolerated it and defended it and taught it. The call to such a church must be, "Brother, humble yourselves before God. Let me humble myself before God lest God come and fight us. Let the word on the street not be there was no lie, there was no false doctrine, we were unclear, we were confused. Let that not be the word on the street. Let our confession be we sinned in this truth of justification, the article of the standing or falling of the church. Let our confession be it is not enough that today we say we all teach justification by faith alone, that's all our positive confession justification by faith alone, let us say we must also reject the heresy that was repugnant thereto and exert ourselves to keep the church free from that error by understanding what it was and acknowledging what it was." And let us, beloved, stand before that throne of God who is holy and say before him, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner. Have mercy on us. Forgive this sin too. Blot it out in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ." And look to his lap in faith and see the Lord Jesus Christ's name on that book with all of our sins, that sin too in it, and look to that other book that has all Christ's righteousness in it that is counted as ours.

The implication of this truth of justification by faith alone is that we are heirs of eternal life. That's the way the Catechism opens this truth. "What doth it profit thee now that thou believest all this? That I am righteous in Christ, before God, and an heir of eternal life." For Jesus' sake who stood in my place before that throne of God and covered my sins and obeyed Jehovah's law, and standing there before God's throne, the Lord has made a place for me in heaven before God's throne too. We are heirs of eternal life

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Oh, how precious is this truth of justification by faith alone to the believer, and how precious is this truth to the church of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee for thy word to us this evening. Bless that word, apply it to our hearts, encourage us by it, and we beseech thee, Father, that thou wilt justify us for the sake of Jesus Christ, forgiving our sins, forgiving our sins as thy people and as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ too. Be merciful to us, the sinners, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Psalter #83. How blessed is he whose trespass hath freely been forgiven, whose sin is wholly covered before the sight of heaven. All three of 83.

"How blest is he whose trespass
hath freely been forgiv'n,
whose sin is wholly covered
before the sight of heav'n.
Blest he to whom Jehovah
will not impute his sin,
who hath a guileless spirit,
whose heart is true within.

While I kept guilty silence,
my strength was spent with grief;
thy hand was heavy on me,
my soul found no relief.
But when I owned my trespass,
my sin hid not from thee,
when I confessed transgression,
then thou forgavest me.

So let the godly seek thee
in times when thou art near;
no whelming floods shall reach them,
nor cause their hearts to fear.
In thee, O Lord, I hid me,
thou savest me from ill,
and songs of thy salvation
my heart with rapture thrill."

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Amen.