



*Abiding Word Lutheran Church  
June 6, 2009*

## **AGENDA**

9:00-9:20	Welcome and Introduction
9:20-9:30	Devotion—2 Corinthians 4
9:30-10:30	Bible Study
10:30-10:50	Group Sharing
10:50-11:00	Assignments and Prayer



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## Session One

### What Does My Faith Mean To Me?

Martin Luther once said, "If the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost." Without the doctrine of justification we have no hope for ourselves and we have no message for anyone else. Justification is the very core of our faith and it is this beautiful doctrine that we are privileged to carry to the world. In this session we will examine this key doctrine in order to get a better understanding of *what my faith means to me*.

- 1. We believe that God has justified all sinners, that is, he has declared them righteous for the sake of Christ. This is the central message of Scripture upon which the very existence of the church depends. It is a message relevant to people of all times and places, of all races and social levels, for "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18). All need forgiveness of sins before God, and Scripture proclaims that all have been justified, for "the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18).*
  - What does the word *justification* mean? (Dt. 25:1; Proverbs 17:15; Luke 7:29)
  - What does it mean to be righteous? to be declared righteous?
  - When was this declaration made? (Rom. 4:23-25)
  - Has God really declared the *whole world* justified?
  - What's the point of evangelism if the whole world has been justified? (2 Cor. 5:19, 20)
- 2. We believe that individuals receive this free gift of forgiveness not on the basis of their own works, but only through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9). Justifying faith is trust in Christ and his redemptive work. This faith justifies not because of any power it has in itself, but only because of the salvation prepared by God in Christ, which it embraces (Romans 3:28; 4:5). On the other hand, although Jesus died for all, Scripture says that "whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Unbelievers forfeit the forgiveness won for them by Christ (John 8:24).*

- Lutherans refer to justification as an *alien righteousness*. What do you think this means?
  - Isn't faith the small contribution that we make towards our salvation?
  - Compare Ephesians 2:8, 9 with James 2:24. Is this the most glaring contradiction in Scripture? How can these two passages stand next to each other?
  - What does it mean that faith doesn't have any "power...in itself."
3. *We believe that people cannot produce this justifying faith, or trust, in their own hearts, because "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him" (1 Corinthians 2:14). In fact, "the sinful mind is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7). It is the Holy Spirit who gives people faith to recognize that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit works this faith by means of the gospel (Romans 10:17). We believe, therefore, that a person's conversion is entirely the work of God's grace. Rejection of the gospel is, however, entirely the unbeliever's own fault (Matthew 23:37).*
- Why is the gospel foolishness to the human mind? (Gal. 5:11)
  - If I can reject the gift doesn't that mean that I have accepted the gift? (Eph. 2:4, 5)
  - How does the Holy Spirit use the gospel to create faith? (Romans 10:17)
  - If God wants all people to be saved and saving faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, why hasn't God simply given this gift to all people?
4. *We believe that sinners are saved by grace alone. Grace is the undeserved love of God for sinners. This love led God to give sinners everything they need for their salvation. It is all a gift of God. People do nothing to earn any of it (Ephesians 2:8,9).*
- Why is there so much emphasis on the fact that we don't take the credit for faith?
5. *We believe that already before the world was created, God chose those individuals whom he would in time convert through the gospel of Christ and preserve in faith to eternal life (Ephesians 1:4-6; Romans 8:29,30). This election to faith and salvation in no way was caused by anything in people but shows how completely salvation is by grace alone (Romans 11:5,6).*
- How can I be sure that I'm one of the elect? (Rom. 8:29, 30)

- If God is going to get all of his elect home to heaven one way or another, why is it so important that we share our faith with those who don't know Jesus?
6. *We believe that at the moment of death, the souls of those who believe in Christ go immediately to be with the Lord in the joy of heaven because of the atoning work of Christ (Luke 23:43). The souls of those who do not believe in Christ go to an eternity of misery in hell (Luke 16:22-24).*
    - Why is faith so important every moment of your life?
    - Does this statement give you a sense of urgency in your evangelism efforts? cf. 2 Cor. 6:1,2
  7. *We reject every teaching that people in any way contribute to their salvation. We reject the belief that people with their own power can cooperate in their conversion or make a decision for Christ (John 15:16). We reject the belief that those who are converted were less resistant to God's grace than those who remain unconverted. We reject all efforts to present faith as a condition people must fulfill to complete their justification. We reject all attempts of sinners to justify themselves before God.*
  8. *We reject any suggestion that the doctrine of justification by faith is no longer meaningful today.*
    - Why would anyone make this claim?
  9. *We reject the teaching that believers can never fall from faith ("once saved, always saved"), because the Bible says it is possible for believers to fall from faith (1 Corinthians 10:12).*
    - What is so dangerous about the teaching "once saved, always saved?"
  10. *We reject the false and blasphemous conclusion that those who are lost were predestined, or elected, by God to damnation, for God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).*
  11. *We reject universalism, the belief that all people are saved, even those without faith in Christ (John 3:36). We reject pluralism, the belief that there are other ways to salvation besides faith in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We reject any teaching that says it does not matter what one believes so long as one has faith in God.*
    - Distinguish between the false doctrine of universalism and the Biblical doctrine of universal justification.
    - How does God bring people to faith? (Romans 10:17) In what way does living a good Christian life play a role in this process?



## **What Does My Faith Mean To Me?**

Take five minutes and write in your own words why your faith is so important to you.

Make a list of things you would add to your statement after hearing other thoughts.





3. Start making a journal. Here are some things that you can try and write about in the next month.
  1. Each Sunday look for visitors and greet them, welcome them to our services and make them feel comfortable
  2. If you visit another church, identify what made you feel welcome and where you felt uncomfortable. Are there lessons we at Abiding Word can learn from this?
  3. Evangelism starts with building bridges and earning the right to speak up. As a first step in this process spend an entire day speaking only encouraging and complimentary words. How did people react? How did it make you feel? Do you need to make changes so this becomes your usual approach? What will help you make these changes?
  4. One important time to share our faith is when people are going through difficult times. Spend 10 minutes each day thinking about and writing about different times in your life when you have needed comfort and either received or did not receive the comfort that you needed. What did people say to you? What did you want them to say to you? What didn't you want them to say to you?
  5. Build a list of family, friends, co-workers or others who need to hear about their Savior. Pray for their souls each day and ask the Lord to help you plant or water the seeds of faith in their life. If you don't know anyone in this category, ask God to help you find lost souls. Think about putting the list on a post-it note and sticking it to your bathroom mirror. Maybe try praying out loud.
  6. If you don't already spend daily time in your Bible, begin a regular study program. Read from cover to cover or use one of the many reading plans included in this binder.
  7. Do the assigned Bible reading and answer the questions

Keep a journal of all of the above - what you did, your thoughts, what you learned, what you want to change in your life, your ideas, your concerns, your questions...