

# JUSTIFIED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

## ROMANS 3:27–31

### INTRODUCTION

As we know, the spirit of the Reformation is summed up for us in five credos known as, ‘**The Five Solas**’—  
***sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, and soli Deo gloria.***

This past Sunday we learnt that *sola Scriptura* was the heart of the Reformation’s method, while the heart of its content was ***sola fide***, or ‘faith alone.’

However, the apex of Reformation theology is ***soli Deo gloria.***

**The great goal or purpose of the gospel** and the Reformation as it recovered the biblical message of God’s plan of salvation is that **God be glorified in the salvation of sinners.**

**Westminster Shorter Catechism**—

*What is the chief end of man?*<sup>1</sup>

*(What is the chief purpose of humanity?)*<sup>2</sup>

*Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*

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<sup>1</sup> Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *Creeeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 411.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Tellinghuisen, *A Catechism for Christian Growth: 190 Questions and Answers to Strengthen the Roots of Our Faith* (Eugene, OR: Kress Biblical, 2023), 23.

As **John Piper** writes of the Reformer, **John Calvin**—

*“The issue is not, first, the well-known sticking points of the Reformation: justification, priestly abuses, transubstantiation, prayers to saints, and papal authority.... Beneath all of them, the fundamental issue for John Calvin—from the beginning of his life to the end—was the issue of the centrality and supremacy and majesty of the glory of God.”*<sup>3</sup>

As **one author** states—

*“**Soli Deo gloria** can be understood as the glue that holds the other solas in place, or the centre that draws the other solas into a grand, unified whole.”*<sup>4</sup>

He then explains—

*“The fact that salvation is by faith alone, grace alone, and Christ alone, without any meritorious contribution on our part, ensures that all glory is God’s and not our own.”*<sup>5</sup>

That is precisely what we **learned this past week** as Paul explained in **verses 25–26** that justification is for the **purpose of glorifying God**.

As we study the remainder of **chapter 3** in **verses 26–31**, Paul draws **three inferences about faith** from the previous paragraph—the paragraph at the centre of the Bible, perhaps the most important paragraph ever written.

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *John Calvin and His Passion for the Majesty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 15–16.

<sup>4</sup> David VanDrunen, *God’s Glory Alone—the Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters*, The 5 Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

**By way of introduction**, then, let's consider the subject of **the glory of God**.

As we've previously defined it, theologian **John Walvoord** states that—

*“The glory of God is the outward display or manifestation of His inherent perfections or attributes.”<sup>6</sup>*

Another author, **James Hamilton**, argues—

*“The glory of God is the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation, that He gains from His revelation of Himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth.”<sup>7</sup>*

That is, the glory of God is the **display of who He is in what He does**.

We find this in the foundational text of **Exodus 33–34**.

In **Exodus 33:18–19**, Moses made the bold request that Yahweh, the majestic and holy God, would reveal Himself and let Moses see the display of His glory—

**18 Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!”**

**19 And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of Yahweh before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.”**

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<sup>6</sup> John F. Walvoord, “Glory,” in *The Theological Wordbook*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, Swindoll Leadership Library (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, Inc., 2000), 138.

<sup>7</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 56.

That revelation of God's glory is soon expanded in

**Exodus 34:6-7**—

<sup>6</sup> **Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;**

<sup>7</sup> **who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”**

In this expanded revelation of His **majestic greatness and holy perfection** that we refer to as God's glory, we see that God's glory is **displayed in both salvation and judgement**.

Those **two themes** are interwoven together throughout Scripture as the **apex of displaying God's glory**.

As **Hamilton** explains—

*“The reality of judgment should keep us from thinking of God in purely sentimental terms as though he were a grandfatherly buddy who just lets things go.*

*The reality of salvation should likewise keep us from thinking of God as merely a terrifying, vengeful judge.”<sup>8</sup>*

The reason why these two themes of salvation and judgement are **inseparably woven together** in Scripture is because in the work of God, **salvation always comes through judgment**.

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<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 57.

For the Israelites, their salvation from the bondage of slavery came through the judgement of Egypt.

As Paul has explained to us in Romans, salvation from the wrath of God—salvation from the just judgement of God against the human rebellion of sin—doesn't come from abandoning judgment, but through judgement.

Our salvation in Christ comes through God's judgement of Christ.

That is precisely what we've just learnt in **3:21–26**.

The righteous God can only righteously righteous the unrighteous **by means of the atoning work of Christ**.

That is, God can only justify sinners through faith by means of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.

Therefore, **our salvation comes through the judgement of Christ**.

This is why the Reformers held to the credo of ***soli Deo gloria***.

God is glorified—the weight of the majestic goodness of who He is is displayed most effectively—shines most brightly—as He saves sinners through Jesus Christ in the **greatest display of both His just judgement and merciful salvation**.

## PROPOSITION

As we'll learn today, faith is the **most appropriate human response** to the gospel not only because it is the means by which God justifies sinners, but also because it is the **means by which God is glorified** in the justification of sinners.

That's what we'll learn from **Romans 3:27–31** as Paul develops **three implications of faith** from his previous paragraph.

We'll learn that **justification by faith glorifies God**—

1. As the means of legal righteousness (**27–28**)
2. As the one plan for Jewish and Gentile righteousness (**29–30**)
3. As the foundation of moral righteousness (**31**)

## 1. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH GLORIFIES GOD AS THE MEANS OF LEGAL RIGHTEOUSNESS (27–28)

The **first inference** that Paul draws looks back over the **majority of the preceding paragraph**, from **verses 21–25**.

Paul returns to his **rhetorical questions** that were typical of the **diatribe** style of writing as he asks—

**27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded.**

As Paul argues, obtaining righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ **rules out any legitimate boast** from the sinner.

In other words, people **cannot brag** because God justifies them by faith alone.

God's entire plan of salvation—the gospel of Jesus Christ—is designed to **exclude human boasting**, as Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

**26 For consider your calling, brothers, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble.**

**27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,**

**28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may abolish the things that are,**

**29 so that no flesh may boast before God. {PTO}**

<sup>30</sup> **But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,**

<sup>31</sup> **so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”**

That principle was established earlier by the prophet Jeremiah when he wrote in **Jeremiah 9:23-24**—

<sup>23</sup> **Thus says Yahweh, “Let not a wise man boast in his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast in his might; let not a rich man boast in his riches,**

<sup>24</sup> **but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who shows lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares Yahweh.**

The principle is simple—**works earn, but faith only receives.**

That is the same principle that Paul appeals to later in **Romans 6:23**—

**For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Paul points to the end results of sin and grace—unrepentant sin receiving condemnation and grace granting the gift of eternal life.

But he also points to the difference between those who look for **“wages”** from what they earn and those who look for a **“gift”** from God in His grace.

The principle that works earn, but faith only receives is **easy to understand**.

**Faith achieves nothing** but instead humbly receives and trusts in what God gives.

**Faith doesn't accomplish anything** but instead relies on what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, faith **can't claim any credit** and the recipient of grace cannot make any boast.

In other words, **faith humbles man and glorifies God** because **the one who achieves is the one who gets the glory**.

As **John Calvin** argues—

*“We never truly glory in Him until we have utterly discarded our own glory.... The elect are justified by the Lord, in order that they may glory in Him, and in none else.”<sup>9</sup>*

**<sup>27</sup> Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.**

Here Paul uses a play on words by using “**law**” as a **metaphor** for a **principle**.

We should understand Paul to be saying—

**By what kind of [principle]? Of works? No, but by a [principle] of faith.**

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in VanDrunen, *God's Glory Alone*, 13.

Clearly then, Paul is **contrasting** those who **foolishly and vainly** boast in their religious efforts to obtain a righteousness through their obedience to the Law with those who **rely on the righteousness of God through faith**.

This suggests that Paul is primarily referring to **Jewish boasting** in their legalistic achievements.

However, we should see in this Jewish boast a **representation of all human boasting** in religious accomplishments.

All such boasting is **nonsense in light of God's grace**.

Nothing a human being does will ever justify them before God.

- Faith is based on our relationship with God, not our performance for God.
- Faith admits that we can't keep the law or measure up to God's standards—we need help.
- Faith eliminates the pride of human effort, because faith is not a deed that we do—it is God's gift to us.
- Faith exalts what God has done, not what people do.

**28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

**Luther**, like all the Reformers, understood ***sola fide*** to be an essential element of the gospel because it ascribes salvation to Christ alone (***solus Christus***) and glory to God alone (***solus Deo gloria***).

When Luther translated this verse in the German Bible, he inserted the word “**alone**” after faith.

That is certainly the **sense and emphasis** that Paul intends.

Here many argues that Paul’s statement that “**a man is justified by faith [alone] apart from works of the Law,**” contradicts what James says in **James 2:24**—

**A man is justified by works and not by faith alone.**

However, when each statement is considered in context, we find that Paul and James are in **complete agreement**.

We can understand that better by considering each author’s approach to the **concepts of faith, works, and justification**<sup>10</sup>—

**James**—

**Faith:** Exposes phoney faith that cannot justify.

**Works:** Emphasises works that flow from faith.

**Justification:** God’s initial declaration fulfilled through life of faithfulness.

**Paul**—

**Faith:** Emphasises faith in Christ alone as the means of justification.

**Works:** Exposes phoney works that cannot get anyone into God’s covenant.

**Justification:** God’s initial declaration, which will be demonstrated in life and confirmed at final judgment.

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<sup>10</sup> Chris Bruno, *Paul vs. James: What We’ve Been Missing in the Faith and Works Debate*, ed. Kevin P. Emmert (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 109.

As **Joel Beeke** explains so well—

*“Paul and James speak with one voice as they teach justification by faith. They just look at this faith from different perspectives.*

*Paul exposes those who say they are saved because they perform the law’s rituals and tells them it is only by faith in Christ that they can be saved....*

*James exposes the hypocrite who claims to have faith but whose claim is contradicted by his actions....*

*Paul says that faith alone saves, and James adds that saving faith is never alone. Saving faith is a faith that works.”<sup>11</sup>*

**In restating the principle** that he established in **verses 21–25** of justification by faith alone, Paul draws out the **implication that faith humbles man and exalts God.**

God is glorified by means of declaring unrighteousness sinners righteous through faith.

That is because this **legal declaration** points away from the accomplishments of man to the accomplishments of God in the atoning death of Christ on the cross.

Therefore, ***solī Deo gloria*** reminds us, as one author argues, that—

*“The highest purpose of God’s plan of salvation in Christ, made known in Scripture, is not our own beatitude, wonderful as that is. The highest purpose is God’s own glory. God glorifies Himself through the abundant blessings He bestows upon us.”<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Steven J. Lawson, *Root and Fruit: Harmonizing Paul and James on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> VanDrunen, *God’s Glory Alone*, 15–16.

## 2. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH GLORIFIES GOD AS THE ONE PLAN FOR JEWISH AND GENTILE RIGHTEOUSNESS (29–30)

The **second inference** that Paul draws looks back over **verses 22–23**.

With a **second rhetorical question**, Paul asks—

**29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also**

The obvious answer, **even for a prejudiced Jew**, would have to be, as Paul states, “**Yes, of Gentiles also.**”

If there is only one God, then He has to be the God of Gentiles as well as of Jews.

If there is only one God, He has to be the God of everyone.

For a Jew to deny that statement would be to affirm **polytheism**—a belief in multiple gods.

This is the great sin of idolatry that any religious Jew would have utterly rejected—at least in their confession of faith.

So even Paul’s opponents must agree, if there is only one God then He must be God of both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul furthers his argument in **verse 30**—

<sup>30</sup> since indeed God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that faith, is one.

Paul is clearly buttressing his argument by appealing to the **Shema**—the best known verse in all of Judaism.

### Deuteronomy 6:4

**“Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one!”**

In addition, Paul must surely have been aware of **Zechariah 14:9** which speaks of God’s purpose in uniting all peoples under His Kingdom—

**Yahweh will be king over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be the only one, and His name one.**

So then, Paul makes a profound argument, based on the Old Testament, that **the oneness of God indicates** that there is **one way of salvation** so that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith.

<sup>30</sup> since indeed God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that faith, is one.

As Paul argues, God justifies both Jews and Gentiles by faith.

God does not exclude Gentiles but allows them to access Him the same way Jews can—by faith.

This is what Paul calls “**the mystery of Christ**” in **Ephesians 3:4**, and then explains in **verse 6** the mystery was—

**that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel**

In other words, when we consider the context of **Romans 2–3**, Paul is emphasising that **faith rather than circumcision** is the **means for becoming a member** of the people of God.

The gospel begins to **fulfil the vision of Zechariah** as God is now the **covenant Lord of both Jews and Gentiles**.

So justification by faith glorifies God as the **one plan for Jewish and Gentile righteousness**.

God includes all peoples not because of their worthiness, but **because of Christ's**, as we see in **Isaiah 49:6**—

**[Yahweh] says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to cause the preserved ones of Israel to return; I will also give You as a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”**

We see the fulfilment in that glorious vision of **Revelation 5:9-14**—

**<sup>9</sup> They sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain and purchased for God with Your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**

**<sup>10</sup> And You made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth.”**

**<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,**

**<sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.”**

**13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be the blessing and the honour and the glory and the might forever and ever.”**

**14 And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.**

### 3. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH GLORIFIES GOD AS THE MEANS OF MORAL RIGHTEOUSNESS (31)

The **third inference** that Paul draws looks back on **verse 21** in particular.

With a **third rhetorical question**, Paul asks—

**31 Do we then abolish the Law through faith? May it never be!**

The word “**abolish**” here means to **cause something to lose its power or effectiveness**.<sup>13</sup>

Paul asks rhetorically whether justification by faith alone **invalidates the Law**, especially since justification is **not dependent upon obedience to the Law**.

Jesus used similar language to counter the accusation that He wanted to set the teaching of the OT aside.

#### **Matthew 5:17**

**“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfil.”**

So clearly the idea of “**abolish**” is the **opposite of fulfil**.

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<sup>13</sup> BDAG., καταργέω.

Paul explains that, **as far as salvation is concerned**, the gospel does not replace the Law because the Law was **never a means of salvation**.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, Paul confidently argues that justification by faith upholds the Law—

**31 Do we then abolish the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.**

Paul will still explain this point in greater detail in his letter, but Paul was never opposed to the Law, as he says in

**Romans 7:12**—

**So, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**

Rather, Paul **opposed the misuse of the Law**, especially through **legalism** which tries vainly to use the Law as a means of making oneself right with God.

That said, Paul affirmed that believers who are justified uphold or “**establish the Law**.”

That is, their **justification becomes the means** by which they live out a **moral righteousness in their daily practice**.

That is what he clarifies later in **Romans 8:4** when he says that those who are “**in Christ Jesus**” (**8:1**) are those who fulfil the “**righteous requirement of the Law**.”

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<sup>14</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Romans*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 228.

Paul explains how that works by **linking the believer's ability** to progress in the daily obedience of sanctification to their justification through faith.

**Romans 6:6-7**—

<sup>6</sup> **knowing this, that our old man was crucified with [Christ], in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;**

<sup>7</sup> **for he who has died has been justified from sin.**

In other words, those who have faith in Christ will keep the Law and thus “**establish**” it.

That is because the moral norms of the Law still function as the **authoritative will of God** for the believer since they are part of the **Law of Christ**.<sup>15</sup>

This is precisely what we concluded earlier when we **compared the teaching of Paul with that of James**.

We should, then, understand that justification by faith “**establishes**” or confirms the Law in **three ways**<sup>16</sup>—

**First**, it establishes the Law by **paying the penalty of death**, which the Law demanded of those who failed to perfectly obey its righteous requirements.

**Second**, justification by faith establishes the Law by fulfilling its purpose of **driving men to faith in Jesus Christ**.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 216.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. MacArthur, *Romans*, 228–229.

## Galatians 3:24—

**Therefore the Law has become our tutor unto Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.**

**Third**, justification by faith establishes the Law by **providing believers the potential for fulfilling it.**

This third way seems to be the **primary sense** that Paul has in mind, especially as he develops that idea in **chapters 6–8**.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, justification by faith glorifies God as the **means of moral righteousness.**

A change in legal righteousness enables a justified believer to live out a change in moral righteousness, and this daily obedience is the essence of worship according to the OT and NT.

Thus, God is glorified not only in declaring His sinners to be righteous, **but in transforming them** through a new heart and the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**As both Paul and James would agree**, faith alone saves, but saving faith is never alone.

Saving faith is a faith that works by living out the righteous requirements of the Law—

**“the obedience of faith” (1:5).**

If you are a true Christian, the **root of justification** must produce the **fruit of justification** which is sanctification.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *Romans, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 139–140.

## CONCLUSION

**The Reformation credos** faithfully represent Paul's teaching on the gospel in the letter of Romans.

Every element of the gospel is necessary in order to fulfil the **purpose of glorifying God** in the salvation of His chosen people.

As **Nate Pickowicz** explains so well—

*“If we deny **sola Scriptura**, we effectively make our own wisdom and experience the authority in all spiritual life, and not the revealed Word of God.*

*If we deny **sola gratia**, we elevate our own will above the sovereign will of God.*

*If we deny **sola fide**, we exalt our own self-righteous works, while diminishing the saving work of Jesus Christ.*

*If we deny **solus Christus**, we fix our gaze on created beings, and not on Christ, as the object of our worship and adoration.*

*A denial of biblical Christian doctrine makes us idolaters, and robs God of the glory due His name.*

*However, if we live and believe in such a way that glorifies the Lord, then all of our Christian life exists **soli Deo gloria**—for the glory of God alone.”<sup>18</sup>*

The key to **soli Deo gloria** is **sola fide**—You fulfil your **created purpose of glorifying God** by relating to God and all that He has done in Christ on the basis of faith alone.

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<sup>18</sup> Nate Pickowicz, *Why We're Protestant: The Five Solas of the Reformation, and Why They Matter* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2022), 110.

That is the **main point that Paul made** as he drew out **three implications** from his explanation of justification by faith—the heart of the gospel.

As we learned, **justification by faith glorifies God**—

4. As the means of legal righteousness (27–28)
5. As the one plan for Jewish and Gentile righteousness (29–30)
6. As the foundation of moral righteousness (31)

**The chief purpose of God’s salvation of sinners is His own glory.**

As Paul explained, the way you glorify God is by **receiving the righteousness of God through faith** and then **living according to that same righteousness**.

Therefore, **you must embrace the gospel** not only for your own salvation, but because you glorify God through the faith that receives His work in Christ, **because the one who does the work gets the glory**.

**“LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”**

The way you glorify God is by **responding to the good news** of His saving work in Christ by **receiving it through faith**.

**So glorify God** by **receiving** the salvation accomplished by Christ through the **faith that boasts in His work** not your own.

## BENEDICTION

**2 Corinthians 13:14**

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with you all.**