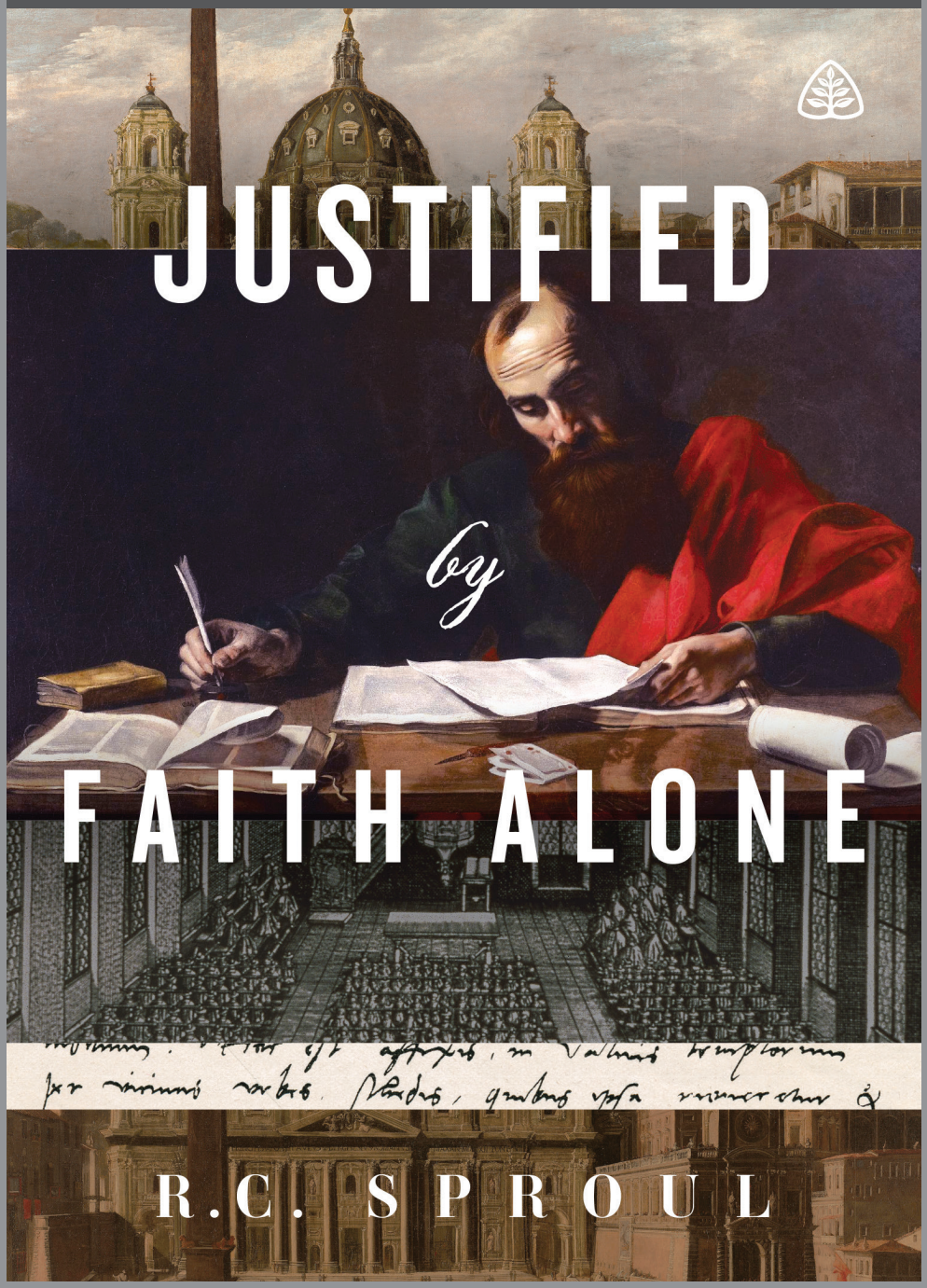
STUDY GUIDE



JUSTIFIED by FAITH ALONE

R.C. SPROUL

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R.C. Sproul

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A Doctrine for Today

INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is essential to our understanding of the gospel itself. In this introductory lesson, Dr. Sproul argues that justification by faith alone remains, to this day, a doctrine with eternal consequences.

LESSON OBJECTIVE

To demonstrate how the doctrine of justification by faith alone is as important today as it was at the time of the Reformation

SCRIPTURE READING

The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty.

—Numbers 14:18

LECTURE OUTLINE

A. The Protestant Reformation was the deepest fracture in the entire history of the church, which shows the importance of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
   1. One church historian has noted that the Reformation is over.
      a. The battle in the sixteenth century was a vicious battle, yet it has cooled off to the point that it is wrongly suggested that any debate over the doctrine of justification is no longer needed.
   2. The split within the church often led to violence.
      a. A monarch in England was nicknamed "Bloody Mary."
         i. She tried to restore Catholicism to England through radical persecution.
         ii. People were tortured and killed over an issue that has eternal consequences—justification by faith alone.

3. The church has always had to deal with division and debates over theology.
    a. In the fourth century, Arius denied the deity of Christ, which led to the Council of Nicea and the Nicene Creed.
    b. In the fifth century, the church battled Eutyches and Nestorius by forming the Council of Chalcedon to further define the person of Christ.
    c. Yet all of these controversies pale in comparison to the split that occurred during the Protestant Reformation.

B. Luther was willing to let the church be torn over the issue of justification.
    1. Luther would allow this for the sake of those who were not hearing the gospel.
    2. The Latin phrase *post tenebras lux* means "after darkness light."
        a. Luther believed that the gospel had fallen into darkness.
            i. The Middle Ages were a period of unprecedented church corruption.
            ii. The gospel was hidden under the machinations of the liturgies of the church.
    3. Luther understood the Reformation as the recapturing and recovering of nothing less than the gospel itself.
        a. Rome believed that allowing people to read the Bible apart from the interpretation of the church would "open a floodgate of iniquity" that would result in countless churches' claiming to be the true church.
        b. Luther was aware that this could happen, but he believed that keeping the gospel away from the people was inexcusable.
    4. Luther believed that the doctrine of justification by faith was the article upon which the church stands or falls.
        a. He believed that without the doctrine of justification by faith, Christianity would be lost.
        b. Without the gospel, the church would have no reason to exist.

C. The doctrine of justification by faith alone answers the question, "What must I do to be saved?"
    1. The biggest problem we face is that God is holy, and we are not.
        a. How can we be made right with Him?
        b. God cannot simply redeem people apart from the process of justification without negotiating His righteousness.
        c. God can maintain His own righteousness and redeem unjust people through Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:26).
    2. Justification by faith is not an irrelevant doctrine because it centers on the question of how a person is saved.
        a. Calvin stated that justification is the hinge on which everything turns.
            i. Calvin may have in mind the many times Christ used the metaphor of the door to speak of salvation (John 10:9).
            ii. Calvin understood the phrase "justification by faith alone" to be simple shorthand for "justification by Christ alone."

   b. Many people may consider metaphors like the ones above to be exaggerating the importance of justification by faith alone and discounting the Reformation to a mere misunderstanding.
      i. They ignore all the failed attempts that were made in the sixteenth century to heal the rift over justification.
      ii. These attempts failed because the differences over justification were not imagined—they were real and remain to this day.

D. Believing specifically in the doctrine of justification by faith alone does not save us.
   1. The critique that we are not saved by believing a particular doctrine has been recently leveled against those who hold to Reformed theology.
      a. The doctrine of justification by faith alone actually refutes the idea that you can be saved by believing the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
   2. It is not the doctrine that saves; it is Christ who saves.
      a. Justification is putting our trust in Christ alone.
   3. Simply affirming the doctrine of justification by faith alone saves no one, but what happens if you deny the doctrine of justification by faith alone?
      a. If you deny the doctrine of justification by faith alone, then you are denying that Christ alone saves you.
   4. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants believe that the proper understanding of the doctrine of salvation is crucial for our everlasting redemption.
      a. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is not a minor issue and is critical to the church's understanding of the gospel itself.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The famous statement that "the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the article upon which the church stands or falls" was originally made by _____.
   a. R.C. Sproul
   b. Martin Luther
   c. John Calvin
   d. John Knox

2. Dr. Sproul mentions the _____ century as hosting some major controversies in church history.
   a. Fourth
   b. Fifth
   c. Sixteenth
   d. All of the above

3. Martin Luther did not foresee the difficulties of allowing the Bible to be published in a common language.
   a. True
   b. False

4. John Calvin uses the metaphor of a _____ to describe justification.
   a. House
   b. Hinge
   c. Lock
   d. Key

5. Some scholars disregard the importance of the Reformation.
   a. True
   b. False

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

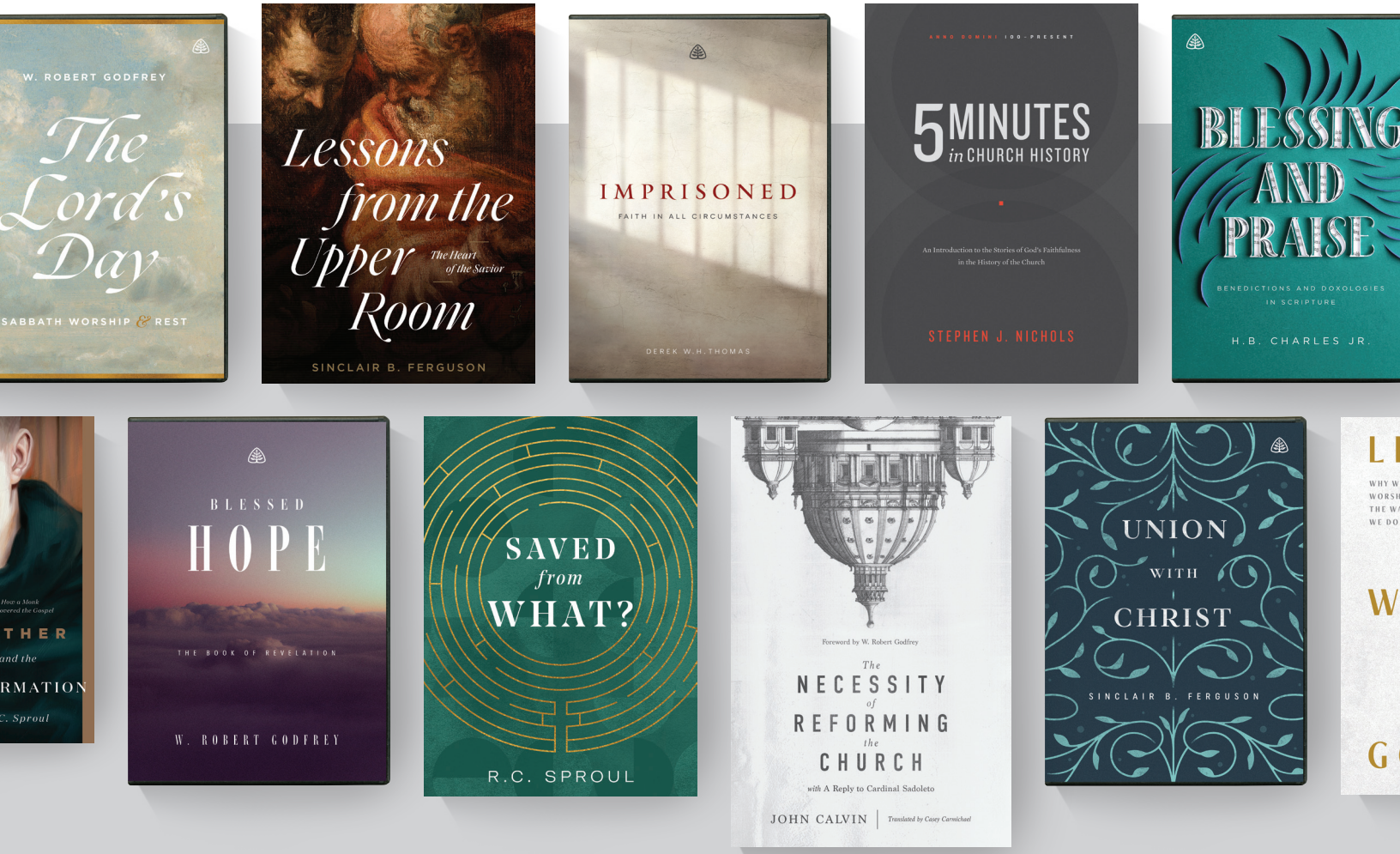
1. Why is the doctrine of justification by faith alone as relevant today as it was at the time of the Reformation?

2. Some modern scholars state that the Reformation is over. What are they ignoring in their assertion?

3. What is the difference between putting our trust in the doctrine of justification by faith alone and putting our trust in Christ alone?

4. What is the danger of denying the doctrine of justification by faith alone?

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