

Sola Fide

Recently we studied “Sola Scriptura”, the first of five “solas” (Latin phrases) that became known as the main issues of the Reformation. Together they show most distinctly the difference between Protestantism and the Roman Catholic church. Reformers had many differences, but these were common to most of them.

1. Sola Scriptura “Scripture Alone”
2. Sola Fide “Faith Alone”
3. Solus Christus “Christ Alone”
4. Sola Gratia “Grace Alone”
5. Soli Deo Gloria “To the Glory of God Alone”

In fact, they are all inseparably related, especially the middle three.

Today we will concentrate on “Sola Fide”. In a nutshell, it means that we are justified by faith, without the works of the law; that we cannot be justified by any amount or quality of good works. That is, we cannot earn a right standing with God.

The root question is in Job 9:2 – “I know it is true of a truth: but **how should man be just with God?**” (also 25:4)

Before we can adequately look into the question of justification, we need to properly understand the state of a man before becoming a Christian. We know by the Word and by experience that all men are sinners, that there is no man that sinneth not. (Rom. 3:9-12, 23) Actually it goes much deeper than that. The reformers spoke accurately about the “depravity” of man. The word depravity sounds too severe because in common usage today it is reserved for the most heinous of sins, but in the language of the reformers, it was not so restrictive.

What did the reformers mean by man’s “depravity”?

It refers not merely to specific acts of sin, but to our nature. Men are sinners by nature: not that man is as bad as he could possibly be, either in quantity or quality, but that he is corrupted in every portion of his being - body, mind, soul, spirit, heart, and will. i.e., man is corrupt to the core - sin is not just surface rust.

1. We were born in sin, by being “of Adam”. (Rom. 5:12)
2. We have each sinned personally. (Eccl. 7:20)
3. We are spiritually blind and deaf (Eph. 4:17-19, 1 Cor. 2:14) and alienated from the life of God (Col. 1:21)
4. We are spiritually dead (as a result of the Fall). (Eph. 2:1, 5) This means
 - a. We are incapable of saving ourselves
 - b. We are incapable of doing anything that is truly good in God’s eyes. If we do anything “good”, it is only in comparison to other sinners, not when compared to God’s standard. (Isa. 64:6)
 - c. We are even incapable of seeing how wicked we truly are, or of coming to God in repentance on our own. Repentance is a gift of God. (see Ac. 5:31, 11:18, 16:14, 18:27, Eph. 2:8-9, Phl. 1:29, 2 Tim. 2:25, Heb. 12:2)
 - d. We cannot choose God on our own. He chooses us, and gives us life (the new birth), which enables us to really see our sin, to believe the gospel, repent of our sins, and receive Christ into our lives.

To deny these things is to think that man is not really spiritually dead, just “sick”.

Justification by Faith

Martin Luther became a monk and was trying with all his power to earn his salvation, even making confessions to a priest 6 hours at a time. He went up the stairs on his knees at the “Scala Sancta”, saying the “Our Father” on every step. People of that time visited the holy sites with the supposed relics of bones of saints, parts of the cross, etc. They bought “indulgences” which were supposed to release a loved one from purgatory. Luther was prevented from saying mass at some church in Rome, because of the massive crowds. This would supposedly have released his mother instantly from purgatory. He agonized over how his mother was forced to stay in torments, merely because the crowds got in the way of his saying the mass there. [the whole concept of purgatory is a Catholic invention, and is found nowhere in the Word.]

This may seem bizarre to us, but even today, men think they must earn God's favor. They think they must reform themselves to become worthy of God's acceptance. Others think they can come to Christ and be saved by faith, but then must do things to stay in God's favor. They live in constant fear of being rejected by God because they didn't do enough. Like a Pentecostal woman thinking she is going to hell because she trimmed her hair, or people who think by knocking on doors, by constant attendance at church, or long prayers or Bible readings, etc. they get points with God. Others live in torment thinking they missed God's direction in some matter, and did not obey.

Now obedience and good works are expected of the Christian, and a lack of these is enough to cast doubt on whether a person really has experienced the new birth at all. In the book of James he asks how a person can claim to be justified by faith without good works. 2:26 – "faith without works is dead" In several places of the NT we see that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and our works will be judged.

But this does not mean that we earn our justification by works. We are justified by faith only, and the result or fruit of that justification is good works. Eph. 2:8-10 – "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works; which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." So let us ask ourselves whether our "good works" are really a fruit of the new birth, or whether they are what we are doing in our own power, trying to earn God's favor, or to show that he was right in choosing someone as upright as us?

So how does the Bible answer the questions in Job, about how man can be just before God?

1. Abraham **believed God** and it was **counted to him for righteousness**, (Gen. 15:6) and it is the same for us. Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6 and elsewhere
2. **By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified**
Rom. 3:20 – 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.
Gal. 3:24 – the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
3. We are **justified by faith, without the law** (i.e., not by anything we do)
Ac. 13:38-39 - ... that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.
Rom. 3:28 – Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.
Gal. 2:16 – Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.
4. By this justification, we have **peace with God**, and are **counted as righteous** "in Christ"
Rom. 5:1 – Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
Phl. 3:9 – And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.
5. All our former **sins have no more power over us**
1 Cor. 6:10-11 – (lists various sins) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.
6. Now in Christ, **we live by faith**. We do not have to do things to "stay saved"
Rom. 1:16-17 – "... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (quoting Hab. 2:4)
Gal. 3:3 – Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?
Heb. 10:38 – Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

According to Vatican.com, these are some of the relics you can see in Rome:

the heads of St. Peter and Paul

the holy stairs (from Pontius Pilate's palace)

wood from the table used during the Last Supper

the Holy Umbilical Cord

thorns from Jesus's crown

Titulus Crucis (the inscribed sign that hung over Jesus during His crucifixion)

three pieces of True Cross

the doubting finger of St. Thomas

remains from the Holy Manger

the Holy Crib

the tombs of St. Matthew, St. Jerome and many popes

the casket and skull of St. Valentine

the tomb of St. Paul and a set of chains believed to be his prison chains

the prison chains of the church's first pope, St. Peter