

The Five Solas (2017): Sola Fide

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[0 : 00] Please take out your copy of God's Word, which I pray is with you. It's well read and treasured in your hearts. And turn to the book of Galatians chapter 3. On the 31st of this month, we will celebrate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 theses being nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Church.

An event which ignited a flame of doctrinal purification in Europe. Much of the Reformers' teaching has been summed up systematically in what are known as the Solas, which we are considering one at a time leading up to the Sunday before the 31st.

So far we have considered a Sola Scriptura, and that is that God's Scripture, the Bible, the 66 books that we have canonized in our Protestant Bible, are the final authority of God on earth. We considered last week, Sola Gratia, by grace alone. Salvation is a gift of God. Today we're going to consider Sola Fide, or faith alone.

That is to say that we are justified through faith alone. And in the coming two weeks, Solus Christus, in Christ alone, or justified by faith alone, in Christ alone.

[1 : 31] And finally, Soli Deo Gloria. That is, all is to the glory of God alone. Now the Reformers were speaking to audiences that considered themselves Christian.

It was a very Christianized culture. There was not opposition in Luther's day to Scripture, or grace, or faith, or Christ, or the glory of God.

But there was much addition and subtraction from these key doctrines. And that is why the Reformers loved the word alone or only.

And we find in our day much error as well. And it's why we should also look to the past and to our Bibles to see that the Bible alone is authority of God.

Final authority. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And this is all to the glory of God alone. So as we consider today, Sola Fide, faith alone, let's look at Galatians 3, verses 10-14.

[2 : 48] Before I read, I remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for His glory and for our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Let's begin in verse 10 and following. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for the righteous shall live by faith. But the law is not of faith. Rather, the one who does them shall live by them.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

So that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith. The producer of a podcast called The White Horse Inn, which I would commend to you, recently conducted a survey at a conference for evangelical pastors where he asked the following questions.

[4 : 09] Number one, are we justified by faith alone, by faith and works, or by works alone? And, in your view, is justification a one-time declaration, or a lifelong process?

Now these two questions are pursuing the same point, and it is a point that is extremely vital to a proper understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ.

So I know I've tipped you off a little already, but take a moment and consider how you would answer these two questions. Somebody comes up to you on the street with a microphone, and says, are we justified by faith alone, by faith and works, or by works alone?

And, in your view, is justification a one-time declaration, or a lifelong process? The majority response of the pastors at this particular conference were, we are justified by faith and works, and justification is a lifelong process.

If you answer these questions in the same way, you are dreadfully wrong. This is likely not entirely your fault. You may have grown up in a church that one of these men pastored, that never addressed the matter, or, if they did, they did so poorly.

[5 : 52] But, beloved, a proper understanding of justification is at the very heart of the gospel. And at the end of all things, you will not be able to plead before God that your Bible went unread because of the church you grew up in.

You see, if we fail to understand justification through faith alone, we fail to understand the gospel. In fact, any misunderstanding of justification is antithetical to the gospel and is very egregious.

That is to say, it's the opposite of the gospel. I fear that in our day, there is more misunderstanding of how a person is saved than there was in the medieval Europe of Luther's day.

So let's be sure today that we all have a clear understanding of justification through faith alone so that, number one, we can be saved. You may find yourself here this morning believing that you're in Christ because you have not understood justification by faith alone.

You may think that you can be justified by your works. That you even being here is gaining you some favor with God so that we can be saved.

[7 : 11] Secondly, if we are, in fact, saved, that we can have assurance of our salvation. How is it that we can know that we belong to God, that we are justified before Him?

And thirdly, so that we can help others come to faith and have assurance. If I am correct, and I believe that I am, about how much our culture is erring on this, then we need to be ambassadors for Christ.

We need to preach the true gospel and help people understand how it is they can be saved and how it is they can be confident that they are saved. So let's do so by asking and answering four questions.

I'm not going to alliterate today to make John MacArthur proud. I'm going to ask questions to make Clay Namor proud. Those questions are going to be as follows. Number one, what does it mean to be justified?

I'm going to use that word a lot today. What does it mean to be justified? Secondly, why do we need to be justified through faith? Thirdly, how are we justified?

[8 : 27] Through faith? And fourthly, what is the relationship between faith and works?

So number one, what does it mean to be justified? At Christ Family Church, we don't use large words because we want to appear smart.

We try to use Bible words because if you're going to be faithful to the Scripture, you're going to come across these words. Some of you, I know, might be going, justified, that seems like a kind of churchy word.

Yeah, it is. Because we're a people of the Word. So you've got to know what these things mean when you come across them in the Scripture.

So we don't want to do away with big words, but we want to press you to understand big words. What a novel idea to give you an education. What a crazy thing. So, justification is a one-time declaration that we are righteous before God.

[9 : 36] The doctrine of justification includes both the idea that our guilt has been expunged, it's been done away with, and that we have been granted perfection.

So, the negative debt that we had has been brought up to zero, and we've been given, we've been credited to our account, perfection, the righteousness that is Christ's.

The occasion for Paul's writing of this letter to the church of Galatia was men who had come teaching what Paul calls a different and contrary gospel, right?

An antithetical gospel. Look at Galatians chapter 1 verse 6 and following. Paul writes, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him, this is Christ, who called you, excuse me, it's the spirit, who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, he's saying that there isn't good news found anywhere else, not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

[10 : 48] He then has some very strong words for anyone who would preach such a gospel beginning in verse 8. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel

contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed.

As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you have received, let him be accursed.

These men who would come into the church of Galatia who are often called Judaizers were teaching faith in Jesus plus circumcision.

Faith in Jesus plus the observation of certain feasts and this equals justification. This was the equation that they were teaching.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right? Faith is good but also must add on to faith works. And Paul cries out in his letter to the Galatian church, no, by faith alone is one justified before God.

[12:01] So this is what justification is. A one-time declaration that we are righteous before God. Secondly, why do we need to be justified through faith?

Back in our text, chapter 3, verse 10 and following. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse.

We are cursed and we are incapable of earning our justification. Right? this is the purpose of the law to bring us to Christ.

To show us how incapable we are of pleasing God apart from Christ. As previously stated, we are justified through faith alone.

No one is justified by their works. Paul is abundantly clear about this in Romans chapter 3. Turn with me, if you will, please, to Romans 3.

[13:04] beginning in verse 10, Paul cites ancient words.

He appeals to the authority of Scripture to make his case in Romans 3. As it is written, none is righteous. No, not one.

No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one.

Their throat is an empty grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

And their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. This is not the beginning of the gospel preached in most churches today.

[14:08] Apart from Christ, you have become worthless. In Christ, you have great worth. But apart from Him, you are as dross to be thrown away of no value whatsoever in the kingdom of God.

Flee to Christ. This is what the law is doing for us. It's showing us our great need. I've heard visitors of our church go away and complain that don't make them feel good about themselves when they come here.

It's not my job to make you feel good about yourself. It's my job to make much of Christ. God is aimed at this very purpose.

Paul is aimed at this very purpose. Flee to Christ. We have no righteousness of our own. We need the righteousness of Christ.

And Paul's not alone in this. Remember verse 10, he says, as it is written. Psalm 14, 1-3. Psalm 53, 1-3. Psalm 5, 9.

[15:19] Psalm 143. Psalm 10, 7. Proverbs 1, 16. Chapter 3, verse 15-17. Isaiah 59, 7-8. And Psalm 36, 1.

The text I just read to you, those are the places, those are all of the references for the places. The scripture speaks loudly to this point. We are under the curse of Adam.

We have his sin apart from Christ. So, we cannot earn our way to heaven. It is a grand impossibility. Paul has been pressing this same point in his letter to the Galatians. You can go back to Galatians chapter 2, verse 16. We know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

So, we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Because by works of the law, no one will be justified.

[16:27] This is the very beginning. This is the bad news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No one will be justified before God by their own working.

And in many churches today, this doctrine, justification by faith alone, has been disregarded altogether. Many churches today, even this morning, I say with a great deal of grief, are preaching a soft prosperity gospel that says, do good so that you'll feel good and you'll get good.

Beloved, this is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. Once a person realizes their need of justification, they recognize they cannot stand rightly before the creator of heaven and earth.

They need to be justified. There is no greater question for that person to ask than, how must I be justified? How is it then? If I can't do it, how is it then that I can be justified?

This was the great question of the Reformation. This was the splinter in Martin Luther's mind. This is what drove him to become a monk.

[17 : 44] He thought, certainly if there's any place that righteousness can be found, it's in the good work of the monkery, which is the proper word. But he did not find it there.

Rather, he found it in the scripture as he was preparing, he was translating, preparing to lecture from Romans chapter one. The righteous shall live by faith.

It is of highest importance this morning that you see your need of justification by faith alone. Now, what is faith? Faith is not merely a mental ascension.

Faith is not merely going, yeah, yeah, Jesus. But it is belief or I prefer trust. But this trust can not just be placed anywhere that you would like to place your trust.

You cannot simply have faith in anything, but you must place your trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So we are justified through faith alone in Christ alone.

[19 : 02] And that brings us to our third question, which I just kind of answered. but how are we justified through faith? Verse 13, Galatians chapter 3, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

So saving faith, trust that Jesus is the Christ. It's a title given to him, the promised redeemer of the Old Testament.

God a promise to sin, and that he is the son of God. Christ redeemed us. Christ paid the ransom to deliver us from the captivity of our sin.

John writes in 1 John 5, 1, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

So saving faith, trust in the person of Christ, who he in fact is, who he said he is, and saving faith, trust in the work of Jesus Christ.

[20 : 17] So in verses 13 to 14, we have these two phrases, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. As it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

So Jesus takes our place on the cross of Calvary. And the second phrase, so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

I see in these two phrases both sides of justification. Recall that our previously defined justification as follows. Justification is a one-time declaration that we are righteous before God.

And then I went on to say the doctrine includes both the idea that our guilt has been expunged and we have been granted perfection. So first we see that our sins have been forgiven because Christ became a curse for us.

Beloved, you see, because God is just, He cannot merely dismiss crimes against Him. He doesn't simply overlook the offense because it would be against His character.

[21 : 25] He cannot. He must punish crime against Him. And if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then your sins were punished in Christ.

This is often called Jesus' passive obedience. He died in your stead. He was sacrificed as your substitute.

This is called substitutionary, atonement. This is a good reformation phrase. Christ died. He atoned for us in our place.

Only God Himself could bear the wrath of God. Eternal punishment poured out in those moments on the cross in Christ.

Your sins were imputed, were given to Christ as He suffered on the cross. And secondly, that we have been granted His righteousness because we have received the promised Spirit through faith.

[22 : 36] In verse 11, Paul cites Habakkuk 2.4, the righteous shall live by faith. In Romans 8.4, and then in verse 9, Paul wrote, In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

And then in verse 9, You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

You can tell my notes got goofy there for a second. So that we can receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. I believe that Paul here is given that other expression of it.

Because we are found righteous in Christ by the power of the Spirit. God requires perfection. And through faith, we are made perfect in Christ.

He perfectly kept God's law. This is often referred to as His active obedience. And His righteousness is imputed, it's given to us.

[23 : 58] Martin Luther called this the great exchange. We can find in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21 a beautiful summary of Christ's work in our justification. Paul wrote, For our sake, God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

This double imputation is what justifies us through faith. It cannot be achieved by works but only through faith in Jesus Christ's person and work.

Faith is the instrument of our justification but our justification is still all of grace. We are justified by grace through faith in Christ.

That is why we do not say we are justified because of faith but rather through it. Here a reformer spoke of faith like an open hand.

A hand that receives the merit of Christ. It's not the work of faith that makes us justified. It's that we believe in the merit of Jesus Christ.

[25 : 16] This open hand grasps hold of Him and what He did bearing our sin and granting us His righteousness.

And that's why we often link the solos together as we speak of them. Justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In this way saving faith is a resting faith.

It rests in Christ's work on our behalf. This is one way you have assurance before God because Christ accomplished it.

In the beloved accepted and free. We're accepted in Christ. Jesus tells a parable in Luke chapter 18 beginning in verse 9.

Luke records Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. They thought they could work their way into favor! and treated others with contempt.

[26 : 18] Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus, God I thank you that I am not like other men extortioners unjust adulterers or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. There's things I don't do and there's things that I do. I thank you that I am so pleasing to you. Verse 13 But the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying God be merciful to me a sinner.

And then Jesus says verse 14 I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

The one who comes humbly I have nothing to offer for my justification except the completed work of Christ.

So this is how it is that we are justified through faith. And fourthly and lastly! What is the relationship between faith and works? What of all the commands of scripture?

[27 : 42] What of the moral law? We mentioned that this morning with the kids. Exodus chapter 20 the Ten Commandments. Can a Christian now just live in any way that they please?

Paul of course denounces this type of thinking in Romans chapter 6 verses 1 and 2. What shall we say then? We just talked about justification through faith alone.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? And in verse 2 he uses the strongest Greek expletive which I cannot translate into English for you and our English translators have rendered it by no means by no means you can insert what you think he may have said there how can he we who die to sin still live in it by no means we are not justified by works we are justified by faith alone but yet we work so what is that relationship good works are the evidence of our faith and beloved we must get this equation right and we must help others see it not Jesus plus circumcision and the observation of certain feasts equals justification or Jesus plus attending church or sharing the gospel or going on mission trips or dressing modestly or avoiding course joking or serving the poor all wonderful things but not

Jesus plus those things equals justification but rather faith in Jesus Christ equals justification which yields good works faith alone faith in Jesus Christ equals justification which yields good works the good works become the evidencing of the faith that we have so we're accepted therefore we work not we work in order to be accepted having been accepted out of grateful response the spirit of God

abiding in us changing who we are from the inside we begin to work that out outside so we pick up and we obey the commands of God right we grow in this this is the process called sanctification right sanctification is a lifelong process justification is a one time declaration it grieved me at a small local baptist school that I used to work at to see the testimonies of students coming in all of the applications of the school had testimonies on it how the the

I could sum up for you the common testimony for young people coming to this small baptist college were something like this I grew up in a Christian home I attended church all my life at summer camp I responded to an invitation and now I go on mission trips and I serve in the church and I hope with every one of them that I read I hoped that that little response was saving but they seem to bank so much in their pedigree and in their activity this is how I know because I'm working look at me working rather than praising in their testimony the work of Christ on their behalf and beloved you are not the hero of your testimony Jesus Christ is and a testimony that's not just covered in his blood may not be a testimony of saving faith now

[31 : 39] Martin Luther notoriously called the book of James an epistle of straw and wished it had been excluded from the canon because of its apparent contradiction of the doctrine of justification by faith alone all of these men had errors at some point he offered to award anyone who could reconcile James and Paul I wonder what the award would have been for that I believe this was largely a reaction to Rome's improper use of the book of James they love to flee to James to make the case for justification by works and it's because of the following text I'm going to invite you to turn with me to James chapter 2 it's right after Hebrews so if you can hit Hebrews it's right after Hebrews beginning in verse 14 what good is it my brothers if someone says he has faith but does not have works can that faith save him if a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food and one of you says to them go in peace be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body what good is that so also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead but what

Helmand will say you have faith and I have works show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works you believe that God is one you do well even the demons believe and shudder now if you've been hearing me across the past 35 or so minutes does this create a problem for you hang on a second he has just said and he's going to say some things that are even a little more controversial soon but but we have to have we have to have it right faith by itself if it does not have works is dead I will show you my faith by my works but then he sets up for us a very interesting juxtaposition which we're about to get into he starts by saying you believe that God is one you do well however is what he's essentially saying even the demons believe and shudder they're in fear of this God but what do the demons not have that he's referring to the works right so verse 20 he goes on do you want to be shown you foolish person that faith apart from works is useless and here's here's who he sets up as the example against the demons who do not have good works verse 21 was not

Abraham our father justified by works that's a troubling phrase isn't it was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar you see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works and the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteous righteousness and he was called a friend of God okay so in our in our English translations this causes a lot of trouble right we go that could be very troubling but what is he trying to show what is the what's the larger context and what is he trying to show right James is saying that works evidence faith right so for someone to simply say they believe and not believe in a way right that shows their belief he's saying is useless it's dead it's dead faith it's not real faith at all it never was real faith right here we have demons who say they believe and yet they don't have works evidencing that so you've got to you've got to see the juxtaposition between the demons and Abraham but we have

Abraham doing what offering up his son Isaac on the altar proving that he believed not just simply saying to God I believe in the promise but actually proving that he saw God as faithful he believed and it was counted to him as righteousness Paul in Romans 4 verses 1 through 3 references the same text as James here what then shall we say was gained by Abraham our forefather according to the flesh for if Abraham was justified by works he has something to boast about but not before God for what does the scripture say Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness verse 24 back in James chapter 2 you see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone another troubling verse and in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way so again

another example of somebody who's working and that seems to be what James is saying that they're justified by the work verse 26 summarizes it for as the body apart from the spirit is dead so also faith apart from works is dead so grapple with this what I'm saying to you is that they are entirely consistent with one another and what James is communicating to us is that if you have saving faith you genuinely place faith in Jesus Christ you will work and evidence that that's the simplicity of what he's doing you will obey the commands of God in a growing way we don't obey it perfectly ever but we're working this process of sanctification growing in holiness a bit by bit day by day further to make my point of the synthesis between the two the book of James was likely written in 45 AD five years before the Jerusalem council at which Paul and James who was an elder the Jerusalem church agreed that we are saved by grace alone through faith you can read about that in Acts chapter 15 so we see the synergy between the two of them so you may not be satisfied with that

[38 : 22] I don't know if Martin Luther would have been but there is Paul and James reconciled pay up Martin Luther later in his life he seemed to have arrived at the same conclusion listen to a bit of what he wrote the very first part of this is on your bulletin Luther wrote oh it is a living busy active mighty thing this faith and then he goes on and so it is impossible for it not to do good works I love this word incessantly it does not ask whether there are good works to do but before the question rises it has already done them and is always at the doing of them he also wrote faith is a living restless thing it cannot be inoperative we are not saved by works but if there be no works there must be something amiss with faith so in conclusion we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone this justification is a one time declaration of our righteousness in Jesus Christ which evidences itself in our activity a faith that rests in the merit of Christ is a faith that works in grateful response let's pray together