

The Five Solas (2022): Sola Fide

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[0:00] Tomorrow we may find ourselves inclined to celebrate the 505th 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. The argument of this document or his reasons why the selling of indulgences for the forgiveness of sin was not biblical.

This was done in a way, I think many people think that it was this massive act of boldness, which it was bold to be sure, but people think, whoa, he nailed something to a church door.

This is where notifications were posted in the day. What Luther was doing was trying to begin a conversation. He was trying to draw the church back to the scripture.

It was his great desire to see the Catholic Church actually reform. In fact, it's a little interesting that we call it the Reformation when in fact it was a separation, most largely.

[1:10] Much of the reformers' teaching, which we are indebted to and grateful for, has been summed up systematically in what are known as the five solas of the Reformation.

They are sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, and soli Deo Gloria. If that all sounded like a different language to you, it is.

That's Latin. And I would encourage you to know at least some Latin if you're going to read well what those who've gone before us have written about the Bible.

So, let me give it to you in English. The Bible alone teaches us that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone, to the glory of God alone.

Now, the reformers were speaking to audiences that considered themselves Christian, much like our day. Generally, there was not opposition in their day to scripture or grace or faith or Christ or the glory of God.

[2:22] But there was addition and subtraction from these key doctrines. And that is why the reformers loved the word alone or only.

They were drawing attention to this and saying this and nothing else. There exists in every age a temptation to drift from the absolutes.

I think the great danger for us is that these grand truths get assumed. That the battle for them has already been fought. And we may come to think that they no longer need to be contended for.

And we may get distracted by lesser disagreement. And certainly there are many truths to uphold and to stand firm on.

But let us not lose sight of the gospel itself. So as a continued brief break from Romans, my original plan for Romans has just been thrown out the window at this point.

[3:25] And I hope to get back on track next week. But as a break from that, let's consider the reformation theme today of Sola Fide by turning to Galatians chapter 3.

I do hope you have a copy of God's word with you today. Probably pull it up on your phone.

People died that you might hold that precious word in your hands today. Our text will be Galatians 3 verses 10 through 14.

Before I read it, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us. It has bearing for us today. It was written for his glory and for our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Galatians chapter 3 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.

[4:35] 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. Now the producer of a podcast called The White Horse Inn conducted a survey at a conference for evangelical pastors where he asked the following questions.

Remember the framework here. He's at a conference of pastors, professing evangelical pastors. And he asked these two questions. Are we justified by faith alone?

By faith and works? Or by works alone? And, second question, In your view, is justification a one-time declaration or a lifelong process?

[5:47] These two questions are pursuing the same point. A point that is extremely vital to a proper understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ.

So take a moment and consider how you would answer those two questions. Here they are again. Question one, Are we justified by faith alone?

By faith and works? Or by works alone? And, number two, In your view, is justification a one-time declaration or a lifelong process?

Now remember, I'm saying to you, We need to contend for truth in our day. So, here's the great example of that. The majority response of the pastors at this particular conference were, We are justified by faith and works.

Now, I think this is a response likely resulting from a misunderstanding of James' argument from the book of James. I think they're accessing some scripture references in their mind, But they're not articulating well the proper position.

[7:00] And, again, the majority response of these pastors is justification is a lifelong process. Now, if you answer these questions in the same way, I want to tell you this morning that you are dreadfully wrong.

This is likely not entirely your fault. You may have grown up in a church with a pastor that never addressed the matter or did so poorly. 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. The scripture is clear on the matter. 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. 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.

He was able to at least point at a single heresy where we find many complications of heresy in our day. So let's be sure today that we all have a clear understanding of justification through faith alone so that we can be saved.

[8:30] You may not be in Christ this morning. We want you to hear the gospel and respond in repentance and faith so that we can have assurance of that salvation. What is true of the gospel of Jesus Christ for us?

And so that we can help others come to faith and have assurance of their salvation. So to do so, we're going to look at this text in Galatians and ask and answer in some measure four questions.

Number one, what does it mean to be justified? Number two, why do we need to be justified through faith? Number three, how are we justified through faith?

And number four, what is the relationship between faith and works? So number one, what does it mean to be justified?

You won't find this definition in the text. I'm going to give to you a definition that will be a working one and we may use it again this morning. Justification is a one-time declaration that we are righteous before God.

[9:37] The doctrine includes both the idea that our guilt has been expunged, has been forgiven, it no longer exists, and that we have been granted perfection.

Our debt has been canceled. Our debt has been canceled and to our credit has been all of the righteousness that God requires. The occasion for Paul's writing this letter to the Galatian church was men who had come teaching what Paul calls a different and contrary gospel.

In Galatians chapter one and verse six into seven, he says, I am astonished that you were so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. He then has strong words for anyone who would preach such a gospel.

He says, 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 received, let him be accursed.

[10:59] These men that he's referring to who are often called Judaizers were teaching faith in Jesus Christ plus circumcision and the observation of certain feasts.

We see this evidence throughout the test, we see this evidence throughout the test, but Jesus plus circumcision, Jesus plus the observation of certain feasts equals justification. Faith and works equals justification.

They said, in essence, yeah, yeah, yeah. Faith is good, but also, and Paul cries out an emphatic no, by faith alone is one justified before God.

So, what does it mean to be justified? It means to be declared righteous before God, right?

Our guilt expunged, Jesus' perfection granted to us. This is the doctrine of double imputation.

Second question, why?

[12:01] Why do we need to be justified through faith? Why does this matter at all? And I love here in these few verses, verse 10 and verse 11 and verse 12, as Paul is apt to do, he preaches a short expository sermon and he cites the text again and again.

He says, beginning in verse 10, for all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, and this is Deuteronomy 27, 26, curse 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, this is Habakkuk 2, 4, the righteous shall live by faith. But the law is not of faith, rather, Leviticus 18, 5, the one who does them shall live by them.

We are, apart from the intervention of God in Christ, cursed and incapable of earning our justification. This is the argument that Paul is making here.

He's saying to these Galatian believers, why would you put any value for your justification in circumcision or in keeping feasts, right? These will never justify you before God.

[13:26] The law was always meant, firstly, to point us to our need of a savior, someone to fulfill its demands on our behalf.

As previously stated, we are justified through faith alone. No one is or ever will be justified by their works.

Paul is so abundantly clear about this. Romans 3, verse 10 and following. This is a text that I read last week, but it bears repeating it.

Another one of his wonderful Old Testament expositions. He's citing from Psalm 14, 1 through 3, and 53, 1 through 3, and Psalm 5, 9, and Psalm 143, and Psalm 110, verse 7, and Proverbs 1, 16, and 3, 15 through 17, and Isaiah 59, 7 through 8, and Psalm 36, 1.

The Bible is replete with this. It's everywhere in it. Don't miss it. He says in Romans 3, 10 and following, citing these texts.

[14:33] None is righteous. No, not one. That includes you, apart from Christ. 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 open grave.

They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of a snake is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery.

And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. It doesn't matter where you find yourself positioned in life.

You may have grown up in the church. You may be a generally moral person. But this is true of you. There is no exception clause in it anywhere. There's no parenthetical unless you grew up in a Southern Baptist church.

[15:35] In fact, if there were to be a parenthetical in this, he might say, especially if you grew up in a Southern Baptist church. Paul has been pressing this same point in his letter to the Galatians.

Galatians chapter 2 and verse 16. There he writes, 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.

Are we beating the dead horse? Sadly, I think that we too quickly forget these precious and wonderful truths.

Once a person realizes their need of justification, there is no greater question for that person to ask than how must I be justified?

[16:35] When an individual realizes their great guilt, the weight of their rebellion against the most holy God, this is the question that follows. How might I be saved?

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, but it is belief or I prefer trust. It is throwing yourself on the mercy of Christ and the promises found in him in the scripture.

Because this trust cannot be displaced anywhere that you would like. There is one way that we are saved. We are justified before God.

And that is by faith in Christ. The reformer said alone. Christ alone. You cannot simply have faith in anything, but you must place your trust in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17:49] So, we must think why we need to be justified through faith. We can't accomplish it on our own. We must see it accomplished by someone else. We must have a righteousness that's granted to us.

We must have the forgiveness of our sins accomplished for us by another. Which leads us to our third question. How is it?

How is it that we are justified through faith? Look at the rest of our text. Verse 13 and 14. Paul here says Christ redeemed us, bought us out of the slavery of sin.

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. That we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

[18:51] So, saving faith, trust that Jesus is the Christ. This promised redeemer and the son of God.

It throws itself on his perfect life and his sacrificial death. First John 5.1 says, Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

There's a lot packed into Paul saying Christ. The Christ, right? The promised redeemer has redeemed us. And saving faith, trust in the work of Christ.

The text says that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. So that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

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

[19:58] The doctrine includes both the idea that our guilt has been expunged and that we have been granted perfection. So number one, we see that our sins have been forgiven because Christ became a curse for us.

Because God is just. He cannot merely dismiss crimes against him. He can't set aside his justice. God is always who he is at all times.

He can't simply like overlook it the way we can tend to do. He must punish sin. It must be punished.

So if there was any way for our sin to be forgiven, it must be punished in someone else. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then your sins were punished in him.

This is often called Jesus passive obedience. He died in your place. He was the sacrifice that you needed in your stead as your substitute.

[21:10] This is called substitutionary atonement or if you like penal substitutionary atonement. It is the very core of the gospel.

And many in our day who profess to be Christians deny this doctrine. Your sins were imputed to Christ as he suffered on the cross.

He experienced the infinite wrath that was due your sin if you would just believe in him. So the debt could be canceled because he paid it on your behalf and mine.

And secondly, we have been granted his righteousness because we have received the promised spirit through faith. In verse 11, Paul writes Habakkuk 2.4, the righteous shall live by faith.

And in Romans 8.4 and verse 9, Paul says, 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.

[22:16] You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the spirit. If in fact the spirit of God dwells in you, anyone who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him. You see, God requires perfection.

And through faith we are made perfect in Christ. We're given the seal of our salvation, the Holy Spirit. Christ perfectly kept God's law and his righteousness is imputed to us.

The great exchange Martin Luther called this. We can find in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 21, a beautiful summary of Christ's work in our justification.

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 his work. Faith is the instrument of our justification.

[23:26] But our justification is still all of grace. That is why we do not say we are justified because of faith.

That is why we wring out the treasures of texts like Ephesians chapter 2, which we looked at last week. We are justified by grace alone through faith alone.

Grace at work in us bringing about faith. The reformers spoke of faith like an open hand, a hand that receives the merit of Christ.

This is why we so often link the solas together as we speak of them. We are 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.

[24:28] And beloved, I am a driven person. I'm the worst boss that I've ever had. I'm very critical of myself.

I always feel like I could be doing more and better. The gospel speaks to this for me. I'm so quick to forget.

I'm so apt to think that I have to now keep up. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Saved by grace alone through faith alone. But now, but now I got to get busy. I tend to have a debtor's ethic.

But saving faith is a resting faith. Jesus said it is finished. My acceptance before God is all because of what he accomplished and not because of what I accomplish.

Jesus told a parable in Luke chapter 18. I think just a few weeks ago, Cody brought this text to us during our Lord's Supper gathering. He said this to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

[25:41] 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'm 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. And I think in all of us, there's this tendency to allow self-righteousness to take hold in our hearts rather than be humble like this tax collector.

This is Luke 18, verse 13 and following the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven.

But he beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And Jesus says, 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. I hope this morning that you, along with me, are resting in the completed work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26:58] But what of works? Right. Question number four. What is the relationship between faith and works? What of all the commands of Scripture?

What of the moral law? Can a Christian now just live in any way that they please? Paul denounces this type of thinking in Romans chapter six.

He says, what shall we say? Then are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? And he says with the strongest language Paul uses in Greek by no means.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? If we are, in fact, in Christ, if he has made us new birth in us faith, that is also going to produce good works.

Right. We now have Galatians 3, 14 tells us the spirit of Christ within us. Good works are the evidence of true faith.

[28:02] And we must get this equation right. And I know that I tell you this often. So not Jesus plus circumcision and the observation of certain feasts equals justification. This is the problem for the Galatian believers.

Or Jesus plus attending church or sharing the gospel. Or going on mission trips or dressing a particular way or avoiding coarse joking or serving the poor equals justification.

All good things. But rather, faith in Jesus Christ equals justification. Which yields good works.

Evidences. True faith. Evidences itself. In good works. Martin Luther notoriously called the book of James an epistle of straw.

Yikes. And he wished it had been excluded from the canon because of its apparent contradiction of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In fact, he offered an award to anyone who could reconcile James and Paul.

[29:10] I think this was largely a reaction to Rome's improper use of the book of James. It was widely abused.

And I think it was his kind of knee-jerk response to the way that they used it to teach justification by works. So let's think together briefly.

We, not too long ago, studied the book of James. But if you will with me, I'd like to turn to James chapter 2. Let's think together about this relationship between faith and works.

Let's do what we can to reconcile James and Paul in conclusion this morning. James chapter 2, beginning in verse 14.

James writes, What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? Right? You can already feel that. After everything I've said, what?

[30:13] What is going on? What is happening? In James' letter. He says, 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 someone 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. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

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, this is Genesis 15 and verse 6, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. And he was called a friend of God.

[31:22] So there's the end of verse 23. Now, another text. This is Paul. So we've got James. Let's pick up Paul. Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 3.

Listen to the apparent contradiction. Paul says, what then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh?

Or works, you could insert there. For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

For what does the scripture say? Genesis chapter 15 and verse 6. They're citing the exact same Old Testament text. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Do these two men disagree? I'd say to you, no, they do not. What James is trying to communicate is that true faith works itself out.

[32:25] It must give some evidence in the world that it, in fact, exists. How do we know that Abraham had faith in the promise of God?

That he obeyed the command of God. He didn't just say, yeah, yeah, I know. You'll bring about a great offspring through my son. God says, but I'm asking you to sacrifice your son.

He goes, well, I'm not going to do that. But I have faith that you're going to bring about a great offspring through my son. He evidenced that very faith.

So, I think there's Paul and James reconciled. Paul driving a point where justified by faith alone. James driving the point which will evidence itself in work.

It will show itself to be true faith in its working. And so, I feel like the offspring of Martin Luther owe me something.

[33:27] I think he made a promise. Come on, pay up, Luther. Now, later in his life, he seemed to arrive at the same conclusion. I'm very pleased to say. He said, oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith.

And so, it is impossible for it not to do good works 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 said, and this is the quotation on your bulletin this morning, 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 the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

This justification is a one-time declaration of our righteousness in Christ, which evidences itself in our activity. Let us not confuse our sanctification with our justification.

[34:41] A faith that rests in the merits of Christ is a faith that works in grateful response. May we not lose sight that this is the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

That it is a faith worth living for and it is a faith worth dying for. We suggest to you that this is a hill that we still need to stand on.

We are still Protestants. And we must contend for this truth. Let us be vigilant to guard it in order that we can be saved.

We can have the assurance of our salvation in the completed work of Christ. And so that we might help others come to faith and have assurance of their salvation.

And may we do all of this to the glory of our great God. Let's pray. Let's pray.