

The Five Solas of the Reformation: Sola Fide

OPENING TEXT: ROMANS 4:1-8

INTRODUCTION

1. While *sola scriptura* was the formal principle of the Reformation, *sola fide* was the material principle.
2. Salvation comes by trusting Christ's work alone vs. medieval, meritorious, moralistic sacramentalism

I. THE DEFINITION OF SOLA FIDE

A. A Simple Definition

1. *Sola Fide* is a Latin phrase, popularized during the sixteenth century Reformation Movement.
2. Man is justified before God only by faith, not works, and Christ's righteousness imputed to us.

B. Historical Context and Exposition

1. **Clement of Rome (Late 1st Century? – Rome's "Fourth Pope" – Some suggest circa AD 70-96) Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 32: *We Are Not Justified By Our Own Works, But By Faith***
2. **John Chrysostom (349-407)**
3. **Jerome (347-420) – In Epistolam Ad Romanos, Caput X, v. 3, PL 30:692D**
4. **The Augsburg Confession (1530) – Article IV: Of Justification**
5. **The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 11 *Of Justification***

C. A Modern Definition and Affirmation

The Cambridge Declaration (1996)

D. Summarizing the Central Presuppositions and Affirmations

1. Humans are unworthy of salvation and unable to improve or qualify for it by their own actions.
2. Faith in Christ and His work is the sole instrument of justification before God.
3. Man is justified when his sins are pardoned and he is accounted righteous for Christ's sake.
4. Christ's sacrifice and His obedience are the sole merits by which human beings are justified.
5. The means of justification has been the same since the beginning of human history.

II. THE AFFIRMATIONS OF SOLA FIDE

A. *Sola Fide* Affirms Humans are Unworthy of Salvation and Unable to Improve or Qualify By Their Acts

1. Abraham was not accounted righteous by his character or works, but through faith. **Rom. 4:1-3**
2. We cannot merit justification by a spiritual resume, not even by our obedience. **Lk. 18:9-14**

B. *Sola Fide* Affirms Faith in Christ and His Work is the Sole Instrument of Justification Before God

1. Who is justified? Not the one who works, but the one who trusts in the Justifier. **Rom. 4:4-5**
2. The "works" in this passage are acts of obedience but are still unable to save. **Rom. 4:9-12**

C. *Sola Fide* Affirms Man is Justified When Forgiven and Accounted Righteous for Christ's Sake

1. Man is justified when sins are put away on the basis of the atoning death of Christ. **Rom. 4:6-8**
2. Man is not justified by an infusion of righteousness or by having faith as a substitute. **2Cor. 5:19**

D. *Sola Fide* Affirms Christ's Sacrifice and Obedience are the Sole Merits of Man's Justification

1. Our only claim to righteousness is the work and worth of Jesus Christ, not ourselves. **2Cor. 5:21**
2. Christ fulfilled the Law then became cursed for us so that we might live. **Gal. 3:10-14; 1Co. 1:30**

E. *Sola Fide* Affirms the Means of Justification Has Been the Same Throughout Redemptive History

1. Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, believers today...all justified through faith in Christ. **Gal. 3:6-9**
2. There is not a different plan for the Jews in the OT. All are saved in the same way. **Ro. 4:13-16**

III. THE CLARIFICATION OF SOLA FIDE

A. *Sola Fide* Does NOT Mean Faith Itself Is What Saves

Belgic Confession – Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith

However, we do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us-- for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness.

1. We are not saved *by* faith but *by* Christ in whom we believe. Faith is the instrument, not object.
2. Missing this point can turn religious faith into an idol against Christ. **Mt. 7:21-23; cf. Lk. 18:9-14**

- B. *Sola Fide Does NOT Mean Intellectual or Emotional Response to God Saves*
 1. The demons know there is a God. They know the Son and shudder, but remain lost. **Jas. 2:19**
 2. Don't mistake cognitive acceptance or emotional experience for self-repudiating trust. **Lk. 9:57ff**
- C. *Sola Fide Does NOT Mean Belief Without Repentance Saves*
 1. Repentance from sin and trust in Christ are the two parts of justifying faith. **Mk. 1:15; Ac. 26:20**
 2. Those who divorce repentance from sin or salvation deny truth. **Lk. 13:3; Ac. 8:11; Rev. 9:20-21**
- D. *Sola Fide Does NOT Mean Works Are Not Necessary for Salvation*

The Augsburg Confession (1530) – Article VI: Of New Obedience

Also they teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God.

1. The Bible teaches man is justified by faith (alone) and that such faith is never alone. **Jas. 2:21-24**
2. Man is justified by faith, not works, but our faith is justified (vindicated) by our works! **Lk. 6:46**
3. True faith obeys God, imperfectly but inevitably, and will continue to do so. **1Jn. 2:3-6, 19; 3:4-9**

IV. THE APPLICATION OF SOLA FIDE

A. *How Sola Fide Will Affect Our Church's Life and Ministry*

1. How should this doctrine affect our church's life and ministry? Radically and pervasively.

Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations. (Cambridge Dec.)

2. *Sola fide* forbids our trust in marketing or ministerial methods. We must preach Christ. **1Cor. 2:1-5**
3. We must not preach moralism, material prosperity, or aim to make listeners feel good. **Ac. 20:18-21, 27**
4. We must preach Christ as the sovereign, sufficient Savior and humanity's only hope. **Ro. 10:1-4, 5-17**

B. *How Sola Fide Will Affect Our Daily Lives*

1. I sin and fall short, repent and try hard, and fall again. But justification does not depend on me.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647)

Q. 33. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Q. 36. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?

A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

Cf. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation

2. What do the Scriptures say? I am accepted for Christ's sake, not my works. **Ro. 8:1-4; 10:8-13**
3. Does this embolden my sin or diminish the authority of God's word in my life? God forbid!
 - i. On the contrary, it emboldens my prayers and empowers my obedience to Him. **Php. 3:7-14**
 - ii. I strive *because* I am justified by faith alone and Christ lives in me. **Php. 2:12-13; Ga. 2:20**
4. "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." (**Gal. 2:21**)

CONCLUSION

1. *Sola fide* means you do not, will not, and cannot qualify as righteous before God by anything you do.
2. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." We trust not in our work or worth, but in His.

EXTENDED QUOTATIONS

Clement of Rome (Late 1st Century? – Rome’s “Fourth Pope” – Some suggest circa AD 70-96)

All these, therefore, were highly honoured, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they wrought, but through the operation of His will. And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men...

(Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 32: *We Are Not Justified By Our Own Works, But By Faith*)

John Chrysostom (349-407)

Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans

But after saying that “it was excluded,” he shows also, how. How then does he say it was excluded? “By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.” See he calls the faith also a law delighting to keep to the names, and so allay the seeming novelty. But what is the “law of faith?” It is, being saved by grace. Here he shows God’s power, in that He has not only saved, but has even justified, and led them to boasting, and this too without needing works, but looking for faith only.

Commentary on Galatians – 3:8

Again, they said that he who adhered to Faith alone was cursed, but he shows that he who adhered to Faith alone, is blessed.

Jerome (347-420) – In Epistolam Ad Romanos, Caput X, v. 3, PL 30:692D

Ignorantes quod Deus ex sola fide justificat:... (“Being ignorant that God justifies from faith alone...”)

The Augsburg Confession (1530) – Article IV: Of Justification (Presented to Emperor Charles V)

Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 11: Of Justification

I. Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

II. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.

VI. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

The Cambridge Declaration (1996)

Sola Fide: The Erosion Of The Chief Article

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical. Although fallen human nature has always recoiled from recognizing its need for Christ's imputed righteousness, modernity greatly fuels the fires of this discontent with the biblical Gospel. We have allowed this discontent to dictate the nature of our ministry and what it is we are preaching.

Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations.

While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to him our sin and imputed to us his righteousness. Because he bore our judgment, we now walk in his grace as those who are forever pardoned, accepted and adopted as God's children. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our patriotism, churchly devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach him.

Thesis Four: Sola Fide

We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice.

We deny that justification rests on any merit to be found in us, or upon the grounds of an infusion of Christ's righteousness in us, or that an institution claiming to be a church that denies or condemns sola fide can be recognized as a legitimate church.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – Chapter 18: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation

I. Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and estate of salvation (which hope of theirs shall perish): yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.

II. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.