

The Five Solas of the Reformation

Sola Fide - Part 4

August 2, 1998

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Romans 10:1-4 NKJV

- **Outline**
 - Sola Scriptura
 - Solus Christus
 - Sola Gratia
 - **Sola Fide**
 - Soli Deo Gloria
- **Historical Background**

Perhaps no other doctrine caused as much turmoil during the Reformation as Sola Fide. It was the very doctrine that prompted Martin Luther in his 95 theses to challenge the Catholic position of indulgences. He had heard a sermon preached by a Catholic clergy which appalled him by its crude theology and materialism. Upon returning home, he drafted the theses and posted them October 31, 1517 on the church door at Wittenberg. Subsequently, the Catholic church condemned Luther's writing and wrote an order to have his works burned. In response, some followers of Luther burned the order. Luther became a prolific writer and composed a number of works that refuted not only indulgences but established the reformational position of Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide.

Later in 1520, a more forceful edict (called a bull) was ordered that would have opened Luther to the possibility of bodily harm and no civil protection. Before imposing the bull, in 1521 Charles V gave Luther the opportunity to repent of his theology and of course he did not. The bull was then enforced and fearing his harm, Luther's followers arranged for his kidnapping and he was hidden in the castle at Wartburg where Luther took the opportunity to begin translating the New Testament into simple German.

The Catholic position in opposition to Luther's Sola Fide was that the grace of God, by His good pleasure was poured into us. As this pouring or infusing occurred, it made us righteous and thus able to perform good works. Our free will cooperating with the grace then performed the works and together made us fit for salvation. It was taught that only by our will cooperating with grace and producing good works was the sinner able to merit salvation. Therefore, grace was infused and we cooperate with it to produce good works that belong to us. Those good works improve with time until they are such that we have pleased God enough to grant us salvation. Justification to the Catholic mind was then a process, not an event by declaration. Perhaps nowhere can the Roman Church's rebellion against this doctrine be found any stronger than in the 1563 Council of Trent canons.

We have already seen the authority of scripture, the lone Priestly role of Christ as Mediator and Redeemer. We have also seen that the way of salvation exists only because of the inestimable grace of God. Salvation would not exist had God in His mercy not provided a means for atonement and propitiation of His wrath. In evaluating Sola Fide, we shall see that the righteousness that the justified sinner stands in is not the works which by performing he has merited grace. Rather we will see that the only efficacious righteousness that will save us is being *clothed* with the righteousness of another—the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.

- **A Biblical Defense of Sola Fide**
- **God's Provision of Righteousness**

Even from the first pages of the Scriptures we see hints of the covenant of redemption that God was revealing. In Genesis 3:21 we see an incredible provision of our Lord for the fallen Adam and Eve. Having come to see their shame, they sewed together fig leaves to attempt to hide their shame. God however, provided a durable covering of skin through the sacrifice of an animal. This early picture of the Gospel reveals God's intent of providing a righteousness that is external or alien to the person in which they will be clothed.

In Isaiah 61:10-11 we again see that this righteousness is not caused by grace in me. Rather it is likened as clothing or a robe which the Lord puts around us and with which He covers us.

In Jeremiah 33:14-16 we see that our righteousness does not belong to us, nor is it of us in any way as we see that our righteousness belongs to and comes from the Lord of Righteousness Himself.

- **God Imputes (Not Infuses) that Righteousness and Not Our Sins**

Paul declares in Romans 4:1-12 that our righteousness comes through God in His mercy, not imputing our sins to us but rather imputing His righteousness. This means that we were *by the nature* inherited from Adam objects of wrath. But so that the purposes of God in election might stand, some received mercy not of their own righteousness but out of His great love

- **We Receive the Imputation By Faith**

Continuing in Romans 4:13-24 Paul shows how this righteousness is given through faith to all who are of the faith of our father Abraham.

In Philippians 3:1-11 Paul repudiates his works as being the basis of his salvation. Although his works may have been righteous, they were rubbish when considered as the basis for salvation. Paul does not crave his own righteousness for he knows that our own cannot save but he craves "the righteousness which is from God by faith" apart from works or any other thing at all which is to say, sola fide.

James does not teach a faith which is the opposite of Paul (James 2:14-26) but rather the same faith with a different emphasis. James teaches that this faith produces good works. This is not the same as the Catholic teaching which declares that faith comes by works. The distinction here can best be summarized by the notion that the Scripture declares that we are saved by grace through a faith *that* works rather than faith *and* works. Or another way to think of Sola Fide is that we are saved by grace through faith *alone* but not through a faith that *is alone*. It is faith alone that is the basis for our salvation, but our salvation is made clearly evident by our works. Compare also 2 Peter 1:1-11.

- **This Faith is a Gift**

Ephesians 2:1-10 declares that the basis of our salvation is the grace of God in the perfect fulfillment of the law in His Son. This perfect righteousness, which is the righteousness from God, is imputed to us through faith. Knowing that the heart is deceitfully wicked, God knew that some might be tempted to boast even in this faith. Therefore, God, protecting grace, provided the faith necessary for salvation as a gift so that even the faith could not be the object of boasting. Our boasting is then in the Lord alone.