

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

SOLA FIDE (*Justification by faith alone*) is the topic of this months devotional. The second of the 'five solas', faith alone is central to the reformed understanding of the Christian faith and the ability of disciples of Jesus to both follow Christ and too come under His Lordship.

The Reformers declared that a central doctrine of the Gospel message was that justification is by *faith alone*, in opposition to the prevailing belief of 16th century Christendom that it was through faith plus works. This doctrine remains central to reformed belief with the word of God in the Scriptures of the Holy Bible clear about it. Yet over 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation there are still some in the protestant church who knowingly or unknowingly compromise this central doctrine.

Let me lay out the central problem, which brings in two of the other *solas*, namely 'grace alone' and 'Christ alone'. Our justification or salvation is by faith alone meaning that Christian believers can do nothing to earn it. So, when people fail to acknowledge the centrality of the doctrine of faith alone, then they also deny that Christ alone is sufficient for salvation and so deny the once for all sacrificial atonement of Christ on the cross which then additionally denies that grace alone is sufficient, in that we must do something to merit salvation.

Start denying one doctrine and the others start to fall, and we find ourselves claiming we have 'a little bit to do' with our salvation. The argument then become that in some small way we are contributing to our justification. But once that is allowed into the thought of the church we lose understanding of the Bible's teaching on God and Christ, sin and grace, and also on faith and the peace of God. All these are understood through our '*faith alone*'. So, when I speak of faith, I am not speaking of something that exists in a vacuum.

Jean Calvin, the French reformer wrote in his '*Institutes of the Christian Religion*', that

*'we must learn that to comprehend the nature and power of faith, we should turn to God's word with which it has so close a link and affinity that nothing else can gauge its measure. For the word is, as it were, faith's objective and its goal, to which it must forever look...The word is the foundation on which faith rests and is supported; once it is removed, faith immediately topples. If the word is withdrawn, faith ceases to exist.'*¹ (I.4)

This essentially states, what I considered in my last devotional on *Sola Scriptura*, that the Bible as the inerrant word of God is both authoritative and sufficient for all Christians in all of life, and illuminates and helps the reader understand the doctrines as laid out in the five solas of the Reformation. In other words they have their beginning and end in the word of God. So, let's briefly take a look at some Scripture that speaks of faith.

In Hebrews 11 we find the so called 'hall of faith', as the lives and labours of some of the men and women of the Bible are extolled, showing that **to live by faith is a far greater life than one lived by a ritual and rule based existence**. Chapter 11.v1 opens (before the catalogue of the saints from Abel to Rahab in v4-31), with these words

'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.'

This is the gift of faith! It is the conviction that based on previous experience we find in the lives of the saints in the Bible, God honours his promises and hence we can be assured of the justification for which our hearts cry out.

God of course is sinless and cannot abide our sin, and neither can He forget unrepented sin for there must be justice, so our sin must be atoned for. That there must be a penalty for wrongdoing is evident, for this is what justice is. And it is by Jesus Christ's substitutionary atoning death that the penalty is paid for our sin, and therefore enables the believer to stand before God's judgement seat. This is possible only by grasping **by faith alone** the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Paul is one of the great writers on the doctrine of justification by faith alone making it most clear in his letter to the Romans. We see that he

lays out in stages that:

a) ALL humans are sinners, without any ability to save themselves

As it is written "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Rom 3.10)

all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Rom 3.23)

b) Only the perfect work of Jesus is able to save sinners

no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law (Rom 3.20a)

now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known... This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. (Rom 3.21-22a)

all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. (Rom 3.24-25)

c) One need only faith to receive the saving effect of the work of Jesus, (NOT works)

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. (Rom 3.27)

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. (Rom 4.4-5)

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring (Rom 4.16)

d) God in Christ receives the glory of justification

Yet he (Abraham) did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. (Rom 4.20-21)

e) Justification will bring peace (shalom/wholeness) to the mind and heart of the believer

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. (Rom 5.1-2)

So, how do we have faith and is it something we achieve in and of ourselves? Again here the answer is no. The Westminster Confession of Faith says...



The *grace of faith*, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word: by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened... the principal acts of saving faith are, accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. ²

Faith is not by our work but is an act of grace, freely received from the Holy Spirit, fashioned by God's word and the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) and our faith is fortified by and through prayer. Faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, acknowledging that He died just for you is the first step to a relationship with God! But what I find amazing is that it is He who seeks and find you and knocks at your door. To the church in Laodicea, the last of the seven churches in Revelation ch.2-3, Jesus said...

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

(Rev 3.20)

This is to the church that is lukewarm, their deeds neither hot nor cold. They were indifferent, unable to take a stand on anything which had led to their idleness, self-satisfaction and ultimately destroying of themselves. Their faith had grown cold.

May our faith alone, no grow cold but remain in Christ alone, through grace alone, to the Glory of God alone. Next month we look at *Christus Solus*. Till then, remain in the faith, sisters and brothers.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2.v20)

Your servant in Christ, *Pastor Mike* (Minister, GMC)

1. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Translated from the French Edition of 1541, Robert Whyte (The Banner of Truth Trust. 2014)*
2. *Westminster Confession, Chap XIV. Of Saving Faith*

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