

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #5, September 18, 2005

Faith Alone – Sola Fide

Martin Luther said that Faith Alone is “the article with and by which the church stands, without which it falls.” “This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour...” “The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines;...”

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the central affirmation of historic evangelicalism. This teaching is the basis for evangelical Christianity. It addresses the *means* by which God declares sinners to be righteous before Him.

This doctrine is the distinctive doctrine of all Protestant Christians, which is the central issue of many that separates us and our beliefs from all other forms of “Christianity,” such as the Romans and the Eastern Orthodox.

- **But what does it mean that we are justified by faith alone?** To understand this concept, we need to reflect on both the nature of justification and the character of faith.
- **Justification** – a legal and spiritual declaration of our relationship to God and His laws, stating that we are completely forgiven and righteous before Him. This is essentially synonymous with **salvation**. “To justify” translates the Greek word *dikaioo* and simply means “to declare righteous.” It can even be used of people *toward God!*

Luke 7:29 (NASB) And when all the people and the tax-gatherers heard this, they **acknowledged God's justice (“declared God just” – ESV, “justified God” – RSV)**, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

- **Faith** – in the noun form simply means “belief” or “trust.” It is a translation of the Greek root *pistis* as a noun, or *pisteou* as a verb. It means to be persuaded, convinced, won over, made certain, received or believed.
- **Watch section 2953 to 3308 of *Martin Luther*** (Note ending scene where he writes in “*sola*” for “alone” after faith in Romans 1:17, which is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4. This was the verse that God used to bring Luther to salvation. His German translation of the NT did add “alone” to Rom. 3:28.)

Read Articles 1 & 2 of Chapter 11 (Justification) in the 1689 London Baptist Confession:

Justification then involves both a *negative* and a *positive* aspect. The negative is the pardon of our sins and its penalty being applied to Christ. The positive is the imputation of God's righteousness to us. We are at once "righteous and yet at the same time a sinner."

Romans 3:21-28 (NASB) But now apart from the Law **the righteousness of God** has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, [22] even **the righteousness of God through faith** in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; [25] whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood **through faith**. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; [26] for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, **that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**. [27] Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but **by a law of faith**. [28] For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith** apart from works of the Law (or *alone*).

- But *how can* God be simultaneously just and the justifier of the ungodly?

2 Elements are involved (one negative and one positive)

1. The ungodly are **forgiven**. It is an act of free grace, by which God pardons or forgives our sins.

Romans 4:7-8 (NASB) "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been **forgiven**, And whose sins have been covered. [8] "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not TAKE INTO ACCOUNT." (Quote from Psa. 32:1-2)

2. But the above pardon is not enough by itself. *Why?* Pardon alone would only produce a clean slate, but not a holy or righteous person able to stand before God. We would simply be restored to the state Adam had before the fall. We must also be **made or declared righteous**.

Romans 5:19 (NASB) For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One **the many will be made righteous**.

- This mystery and miracle of God's grace is rooted in the Person and work of Jesus Christ!

Romans 4:22-25 (NASB) (Speaking of Abraham) Therefore also **it was reckoned to him as righteousness**. [23] Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, [24] **but for our sake also**, to whom it will be reckoned, **as those who believe** in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, [25] He who was **delivered up because of our transgressions**, and was **raised because of our justification**.

- But since all this has to do with Christ, it is apart from and outside of **us!** So **how** can we actively appropriate this grace unto us? More correctly, how does **God** appropriate this grace unto us and **declare** us to be forgiven and righteous?

The **means** or **channel** of God's grace is **FAITH!** Notice back in Romans 3 we are said to be justified "*through* faith" (3:22, 25), and "*by* faith" (3:28, 30). But we are *never* said to be justified "on account of" or "on the basis of" faith! *Why?*

Faith then is *not* the *material cause* of justification, but rather the *instrumental cause* of justification. As with Abraham, in Romans 4, his justification came not through *works* (4:1-8), nor through *sacramental administration* (4:9-12), but simply by faith!

- Therefore, **what is the nature of faith?** Can it have any merit or initiation by the believer and still be *faith*? What other "act" of man can be totally "non-meritorious?" Why is this significant and important?
 1. Since our justification is in Christ, it can be ours only through a personal relationship with Him. Since we put our faith *into* Christ, we are united to Him also. Faith is *personal* and *relational!*
 2. Faith's very nature is *active* in receiving Christ, but simultaneously *passive* (or better, *receptive*) in relation to the justification that we receive! Self is abandoned, not exalted. Therefore, (as per Rom. 3:27) "Where then is boasting? It is excluded." Faith is *non-meritorious!*
- Thus, *faith* is linked to *grace!* "By faith" actually implies "by grace," because of the very nature of true faith! So, **is the value of faith tied to the "faither" or the "faither?"** Is its value and merit based upon the one who believes or trusts, or the One in Whom they believe or trust? Therefore, faith takes its character and power from its **object**, not from itself.
- **Illustration** of great faith in thin ice versus little faith in thick ice over a frozen lake. Which is better?
- **Summary** of the **character** of **saving or justifying faith**:
 1. **Faith contributes no merit** and gains its value from **its object**. *Can we call faith a work?* If we do, it is a "non-meritorious" work!
It is not faith that saves, nor even faith in Jesus Christ that saves, but Jesus Christ saves us through faith!
It is not the attitude of faith, nor the action of faith, or the aspect or nature of faith that is important, but **what?** the **object of faith!**

Forsaking All I Trust Him!

- Illustration of the Navigators of a "Gospel Train":

The “engine” of facts	It pulls the load and supplies the power!
The “coal car” of faith	It feeds the train and enables it to go!
The “caboose” of feelings	It is nice to have, but is along for the ride!

2. Faith is a gift of God. Observe parallel between faith and suffering from:

Philip. 1:29 (NASB) For to you **it has been granted** for Christ's sake, **not only to believe** in Him, **but also to suffer** for His sake,

Note that both faith and suffering are granted to us by God. He gives the suffering, but we suffer. He likewise gives the faith, but we believe!

Ephes. 2:8 (NASB) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**;

Note here that the words for both grace and faith are masculine, but the pronoun for “it” is neuter. So the reference is to both elements, even the whole of salvation, being a true **gift** of God!

Notice that Paul even prays for the gift of faith from the Father and the Son:

Ephes. 6:23 (NASB) Peace be to the brethren, and love with **faith, from** God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Yet, does this “gift” aspect mean that we are not actively involved in faith? Why?

3. Faith is capable of degrees. The NT speaks of:

- little faith (Mat. 14:31)
- great faith (Mat. 15:28)
- sincere faith (2Tim. 1:5)
- strong faith (Rom. 4:20)
- overcoming faith (1Jo. 5:4)

4. Faith has dimensions or elements. The Reformers spoke of three:

- notitia** – the reception of knowledge of God’s revelation, the facts or data, and involves the senses and the mind; **to acquire the truth**
- assensus** – this refers to the mental assent or acceptance of these facts or revelation, and involves the mind and the will; **to acknowledge the truth**
- fiducia** – this refers to a personal trust or reliance on the revelation received and accepted, and involves the will and the affections or emotions; **to appropriate the truth personally**

- Therefore, total or true faith involves the total **soul** (mind, will and emotions) of the believer. (**Example of a chair**: Receiving the facts that it will hold your weight, then accepting the facts that it will hold your weight, and then applying the facts and acceptance to actually trust yourself to the support of the chair by sitting in it!)
- Apply these dimensions or elements to the “faith” of the demons or Satan. (James 2:19) What elements do they have? What element is missing? How does that relate to “professing” but not “possessing” believers today?
- What is the distinction of **Rome’s view of justification** through faith and ours? The distinction is in the term “**alone!**” They believe that faith is necessary for justification, but not by itself. Faith must also be accompanied by works, sacraments, and the merit of the saints and the church.
- From our current study of Galatians, how are we often guilty of the same error? What do we add to faith?
- **Faith and Works**

What is the relationship between faith and works? Is there not an apparent contradiction in the NT teachings here if we hold to “faith alone?” Does not the NT teach that we are to be judged according to our works?

1 Cor. 3:12-15 (NASB) Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, [13] **each man's work** will become evident; for the day will show it, because **it is to be revealed** with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. [14] If **any man's work** which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. [15] If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

2 Cor. 5:10 (NASB) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be **recompensed for his deeds** in the body, **according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**

Ephes. 6:8 (NASB) knowing that **whatever good thing each one does**, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.

- **The Contrast of James:**

James 2:14-26 (NASB) What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? [17] Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. [18] But someone

may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." [19] You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. [20] But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? [21] Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? [22] You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; [23] and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. [24] You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. [25] And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? [26] For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

- We know that God's Word is not in contradiction, so what is the reconciliation of Romans to James, or Paul to James?
- He is contrasting two different hypothetical persons who both claim to have "faith." But notice the contrast in the two "faiths":

Faith A is :

Without deeds	(vv. 14, 18, 20, 26)
In contrast to deeds	(v. 18)
In itself, unaccompanied by actions	(v.17)
Alone, by itself, isolated from deeds	(v. 24)

Faith B is:

Shown by what it does	(v. 18)
Accompanied by actions	(v. 22)
Consummated by actions	(v.23)

This is really a contrast between the granting of faith to Abraham in Gen. 15 (addressed in Romans), and the manifestation of that faith in Gen. 22 (addressed here in James)

In Gen. 15:6 "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." That is exactly what Paul quoted and had in mind in Romans 4:3. But then James notices that in Gen. 22:1 "that God tested Abraham" by commanding him to offer up Issac as a sacrifice. What was God testing? His faith! Paul renounces "justification (before God) by works," but James confirms "justification (before man) by works." Paul is teaching that faith alone unites us to Christ for righteousness. James is teaching that the faith which unites us to Christ does not remain alone. It bears the fruit of love and obedience, or it is *dead faith* (v.17), *devil faith* (v.19), and *devoid faith* (useless) (v.20).

- So, what is the conclusion of James? True faith, which alone justifies, does not remain alone in our lives, but is expressed and justified before men by what a man does, not by what he presumes or professes.

Article 2, Chapter 11 of the 1689 Confession: **Faith** is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and **is no dead faith, but worketh by love!**

Thesis Four of the Cambridge Declaration: (Sola Fide)

We **affirm** 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.