

THE FIVE SOLAS ~ SOLA FIDE

“...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified... I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.” (Gal 2:16, 21)

Introductory

NOT WORKS! – Rom 4:1-5, Rom 9:30-32

Biblical Faith Rediscovered:

1. The material principal of the Reformation as opposed to the formal
2. Luther called it the ‘articulus stantis vel cadentis’, the article by which the church stands or falls; Calvin – ‘the principal hinge on which religion turns’.
3. Why so pivotal? Answers the fundamental question

Biblical Faith Eroding:

1. The great message of past days
2. Attacks on sola fide. Norman Shepherd; NT Wright.

Biblical Faith Understood

1. A crucial and necessary doctrine – Paul focused two of his most important works, Romans and Galatians, largely upon this theme. Reveals an alien righteousness which is not our own (by works) that is of God after indicting the whole race of man – Romans 3:21-24. Pronounces “Anathema” – “Accursed” upon any who preach any other gospel than the one of faith and not works in Jesus – Galatians 2:15.
2. Justification by works or by faith is in either case a forensic act, a judicial act, a declarative act, set in the courtroom of judgment, by the Lord Himself. What is the debate is the ground
 - a. The ground of justification –
 - i. not faith, which is the means by which we receive
 - ii. not bending the law, a lower standard introduced

- iii. the work of Jesus to save us, His active and passive obedience, His righteousness, an alien righteousness. “The law has not been altered, or suspended, or flouted for their justification, but fulfilled – by Jesus Christ acting in their name.” JI Packer
- b. The means of justification –
- i. not doing, pure and simple
 - ii. not doing plus faith, mixing works and grace
 - iii. not any old faith – temporal
 - iv. not faith as a new work or a new obedience; faith non-contributory
 - v. but true saving faith is receptive, passive even, although it is an act by which we go out of ourselves to Him for life eternal. Faith is “a means, an instrument, a way, a foundation, a channel by which, along which, or on which man participates in the [gifted] righteousness of God..”; nowhere is it “the ground or cause of justification” (Ridderbos). Ferguson states: “[Faith] has no constructive energy; it is complete reliance on another. It is Christ-directed, not self-directed, and Christ-reliant, not self-reliant. It involves the abandoning, not the congratulating, of self... Faith draws everything from Christ and contributes nothing to Him. Faith is simply a shorthand description of abandoning oneself trustingly to Christ, whom God has made our righteousness.”
- c. The Double Transaction of Justification:
- i. Our sins imputed to Christ as sin-bearer; not imputed to us (Ps. 32:1)
 - ii. Christ’s active righteousness imputed to the believer; His obedience is greater than all of Adam’s disobedience (Rom. 5:18-19)
 - iii. This transaction takes place as to our status before the bar of God, and outside of us; we are ungodly, and God justifies the ungodly; we are, in Luther’s famous line, *simul justus et peccator*, at the same time just and sinful. (we are *semper peccator*, *semper penitens*, *semper justus* – always a sinner, always penitent, always justified.)
- d. Justifying Faith

- i. Includes knowledge, but not a bare knowledge; assent, but not a bare assent, contra James 2 (esp. verse 19)
 - ii. Trust, fiducia, surrender, commitment even; personal confidence, not in God in general but in the saving Christ in particular. There is a full sale of everything else for Him (Matt. 13:44)
 - iii. This very much out of step with Roman Catholicism's view of justification and of faith – see Terry Johnson, pp. 96-97
- e. Fruit of Justification
- i. Assurance – see Romans 5:1. “You will never find true peace until you find it and keep it in this... that Christ takes all your sins upon Himself, and bestows all His righteousness upon you.” Luther
 - ii. Freedom – set free like the man set free from the court-room; John 8:35-36 “The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (also Gal 5:1, 13: 1Pe 2:16)
 - iii. Obedience – see Ephesians 2:8-10. Faith is the alone instrument of justification – yet it is not alone in the person justified but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith but works by love. (WCF 11.1) “Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.” (Murray) Sola fide is not incompatible with good works, as though it gives any support whatsoever to looseness and carnality. Sola fide is incompatible with good works as a ground for justification. Good works are, in fact, necessary as a proof of a living faith; but good works are never, ever meritorious. Window illustration.