

10-22-2017

Message: Sola Fide - Faith Alone

Text: Romans 3:19 - 4:3

Introduction

- A. In 1517 the Roman Catholic priest, Martin Luther (b. 1483), posted 95 theses on a chapel door in Wittenberg, Germany as an invitation for scholars to debate the practice of selling indulgences to make temporal satisfaction for sins of the living and dead, so that they could be released from purgatory and enter heaven, a practice Luther believed was contrary to repentance as defined in the Scriptures. The 95 Theses did not contain the 5 theological slogans of the Reformation, known today as the 5 Solas. We would not agree with all the theses - Luther's theology was in transition. But his theses created a firestorm in Germany, then Europe, because they were rooted in the most foundational of the Solas, Sola Scriptura, holding the Scriptures to be the final authority for life, godliness, salvation to which the church and its tradition, including the teaching and rulings of popes and church councils, must submit. Luther's younger associate Philip Melancthon (b. 1497) emerged as the systematic theologian of the early Lutheran movement.
- B. In 1519 Ulrich Zwingli (b. 1484) began a reform movement in Switzerland, independently from Luther, preaching in Zurich against corruption in the church, the use of images. After Zwingli's death in battle in 1531, French scholar John Calvin (b. 1509) had to flee for his life from France to a free city in Switzerland after publishing in 1536 (at age 27!) his Institutes of the Christian Religion, a monumental systematic theology from an evangelical perspective. Calvin ended up the prominent pastor and religious leader of Geneva, Switzerland, which became a Mecca of the Reformation.
- C. In 1521 Luther was excommunicated by the Pope, and at the imperial diet (assembly) of the Holy Roman Empire at Worms, Germany, Luther appeared to answer the charges of heresy, and refused to recant. After Luther left emperor Charles V issued the Edict of Worms, which banned Luther's writings, declared him a heretic and enemy of the state, who should be arrested and turned over to the Emperor. While a diet in 1526 appeared to take a more tolerant approach to German cities where princes leaned toward the reformation movement, in 1529 the diet of Speyer reaffirmed the policies of Worms, causing a number of German princes to appeal to the emperor with a formal written **protest**. It was then that the German protesters became known as "**Protestants**." The Swiss preferred the name "Reformers," but eventually all within the reformation movement became known as Protestants. Today the term refers to Christian churches that are not Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox.
- D. Of the many luminaries of the 16th century Protestant Reformation, Luther and Calvin are some of the brightest. With Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone as their foundation, Sola Fide, Faith Alone, became one of their prominent mottos and rallying cries. They believed from the Scriptures that faith alone was critical and essential for sinners to stand justified,

righteous before a holy God who demands perfect righteousness for all who would dwell in His presence. They saw in the Scriptures ...

I. Why we need perfect righteousness before God.

- A. There is no one who can stand perfectly sinless in his/her own righteousness before our holy God.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins.

Psalms 143:2 And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for **in Your sight no man living is righteous.**

- B. But the law's condemnation of unrighteousness applies first to those to whom the law was given - the Jews ("to the Jew first" 2:9), so that if even the Jews, God's chosen people, are condemned for unrighteousness, then no one will have a defense before God and all the peoples of the world will be accountable (guilty).

Romans 3:9-10 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ **as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;**

Romans 3:19 Now we know that **whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;** ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. ... ²³ for **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

- C. We are in need of a justified, righteous status before God that we that we cannot provide for ourselves.

Psalms 130:3 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, **who could stand?**

II. The perfect righteousness we need before God must be a legal (forensic) righteousness that belongs to Christ.

- A. There is a significant difference between the Reformation, evangelical Protestant understanding of justification and that of the Roman Catholic Church which defines "justification" differently (though there are a few Roman Catholic scholars who appear to agree with the Reformers' definition.)

1. Roman Catholics understand justification to be or to include the character transformation of an individual - causing one to be morally righteous before God. Augustine (d. 420 AD) appears to have this understanding, which likely influenced the church. So

justification and sanctification tend to be used synonymously. So for the church of Rome, justification is transformative, infusing righteousness into our character, so that God sees us as morally as well as legally righteousness.

- a. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger headed the Interdiacastrial Commission for the Catechism of the Catholic Church), Article 2, Grace and Justification (p.481-482)

1987 The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” and through baptism.

1989 “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” Council of Trent (1547): DS 1529

- b. Council of Trent (1546-63, met in Trent, Italy, in reaction to the Protestant movement)

Canon 30 “If any one says, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema.”

2. The Reformers then and Evangelical Protestants today understand justification as “forensic” (legal), a matter of legal status before God - causing one to be legally righteous before God.

- a. Cf. justification in the Scriptures does not transform one’s character, but credits, declares, affirms one’s legal status.

Proverbs 17:15 He who **justifies the wicked** and he who **condemns the righteous**, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

Isaiah 5:23 Who **justify the wicked** for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!

- b. The verb “dikaioo” = to justify is used of God being justified, clearly not referring to the transforming of His changeless character, but to others declaring/affirming that He is righteous.

Luke 7:29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard, **they justified (dikaioo) God**, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

Romans 3:3 What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? ⁴ May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "**THAT YOU MAY BE**

JUSTIFIED (dikaioo) IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED.

B. There is a difference between our justifying God, and God justifying us.

1. When we justify God, when we declare He is righteous, we do not change His righteous status - we change nothing about Him.
2. When God justifies us, He changes our legal status, and therefore, our eternal destiny by imputing, crediting Christ's own justified status to us.

Romans 4:8 "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE **SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT (logizomai).**"⁹ Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "**FAITH WAS CREDITED (logizomai) TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**"¹⁰ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

3. God credits Christ's perfect legal righteous status to us though the instrument of faith that unites us with Christ, and therefore what belongs to Christ. As Luther wrote ("Two Kings of Righteousness," p. 87):

Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that He has become ours.

- a. When Christ finished dying for the sins of His people, God, who had condemned Him to death, then justified Christ by resurrecting Him from the dead. Yet Christ had no others righteousness credited to Him but His own.

1 Timothy 3:16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, **was justified (dikaioo) in spirit**, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

1 Corinthians 15:44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised **a spiritual body**. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.

- b. God justified Jesus by raising Him from the dead (His state of condemnation). Now we who are united relationally to Jesus through faith share in His justified status, legally righteous in Him.

Romans 4:25 *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and **was raised because of our justification.**

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, **so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

- C. Luther and Calvin, conscious of residual sin in the believer, were convinced that no one could stand justified in this life by the church's definition of justification, since believers continue to become entangled in sin. Timothy George (Theology of the Reformers, p. 68) states, "Luther came to view sin as a seething rebellion." Thomas Schreiner describes Calvin's thinking (Faith Alone, p. 59-60) ...

"Sin continues to bedevil believers. The continuing presence of sin indicates that righteousness has to be forensic, for no one can claim to be right before God while they are still stained with sin. Similarly, faith can't count for our righteousness since it isn't perfect or constant, and hence count for our righteousness since it isn't perfect of constant, and hence we need righteousness imputed to us to rest assured that we are right with God."

III. Faith is the alone instrument that unites us relationally with Christ and His righteousness.

- A. Christ propitiates the sins of those who put their faith in Him.

Romans 3:24 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, **so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**.

- B. It is not faith plus baptism or faith plus indulgences. In his German translation of the Romans, Luther added the word "alone" to 3:28 after the word "faith" = faith alone.

Romans 3:27-28 NAU) 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**.

- C. Justification by faith apart from the works of the law does not nullify the law but upholds what has always been the law's message of salvation, of justification through faith in the Lord.

Romans 3:31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, **we establish the Law**.

4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.³ For **what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."**

Conclusion

A. We need a perfect righteous standing before our holy God.

Exodus 24:17 And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of **the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire** on the mountain top.

Isaiah 33:14 Sinners in Zion are terrified; Trembling has seized the godless. "**Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?**"

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;²⁹ for **our God is a consuming fire.**

B. We do not have or ever will have a righteousness of our own by which we will survive God's judgment when Jesus returns to judge the world in righteousness.

Psalms 143:2 And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, **for in Your sight no man living is righteous.**

C. Yet there is one Righteous One, the God Man, who stands before God justified in His own righteousness, Jesus, who died for the sins of all who will unite themselves to Him in faith. So cling to Christ to benefit from His righteousness, to share in His justified status, a perfect legal status that delivers us imperfect people from our holy God's condemnation.

Romans 8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation **for those who are in Christ Jesus.**