

John 3:11-15

“Believe Me”

- 11** Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.
- 12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
- 13** No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 3:11–15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Introduction

The **Five Solas** are five Latin phrases (or slogans) that emerged from the **Protestant Reformation** intended to summarize the Reformers' basic theological principles in contrast to certain teachings of the **Roman Catholic Church** of

the day. "Sola" is Latin meaning "alone" or "only" and the corresponding phrases are:

- *Sola Fide*, by faith alone.
- *Sola Scriptura*, by Scripture alone.
- *Solus Christus*, through Christ alone.
- *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone.
- *Soli Deo Gloria*, glory to God alone.

Faith alone (*Sola Fide*)

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. Our justification does not rest on any merit to be found in us, nor upon the grounds of an infusion of Christ's righteousness in us, nor that an institution claiming to be a church that denies or condemns sola fide can be recognized as a legitimate church.

Rooted in "sola gratia"

"The doctrine of free justification by faith alone, which became the storm center of so much controversy during the Reformation period, is so often regarded as the heart of the Reformers' theology but this is not accurate. The truth is that their thinking was really centered upon the contention of Paul, echoed by Augustine and others, that the sinner's entire salvation is by free and sovereign grace only, and that the doctrine of justification by faith was important to them because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace. The sovereignty of grace found expression in their thinking at a

more profound level still in the doctrine of monergistic regeneration." - [J. I. Packer \[1\]](#)

Sola Fide: Our Only Means

The reformers said that it is not enough to say that we are saved by grace alone, for even many medieval scholars held that view, including Luther's own mentor. Rome viewed grace more as a substance than as an attitude of favor on God's part. In other words, grace was like water poured into the soul. It assisted the believer in his growth toward salvation. The purpose of grace was to transform a sinner into a saint, a bad person into a good person, a rebel into an obedient son or daughter.

The reformers searched the Scriptures and found a missing ingredient in the medieval notion of grace. To be sure, there were many passages that spoke of grace transforming us and conforming us to the image of Christ. But there were other passages, too, that used a Greek word that meant "to declare righteous," not "to make righteous." The problem was, the Latin Bible everyone was using mistranslated the former and combined the two Greek words into one. Erasmus and other Renaissance humanists "laid the egg that Luther hatched" by cleaning up the translation mistakes.

According to Scripture, God declares a person righteous before that person actually begins to become righteous. Therefore, the declaration is not in response to any spiritual or moral advances within the individual, but is an imputation of the perfect righteousness that God immediately requires of everyone who is united to Christ by faith alone. When a person trusts Christ, that very moment he or she is clothed in his perfect holiness, so that even though the believer is still sinful, he or she is judged by God as blameless.

This apostolic doctrine, proclaimed to Abraham and his offspring, has fallen on hard times again in church history. Not only do most Christians today not hear about the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone, many cannot even define it. Although justification is the doctrine by which, according to the evangelical reformers "the church stands or falls," it has been challenged. Finney openly declared, "The doctrine of an imputed righteousness is another

gospel. For sinners to be forensically pronounced just is impossible and absurd. The doctrine of an imputed righteousness is founded on a most false and nonsensical assumption, representing the atonement, rather than the sinner's own obedience, as the ground of his justification, which has been a sad occasion of stumbling to many."
{Michael Horton}

Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

BORN FROM ABOVE

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again, he cannot see** the kingdom of God.

5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter** the kingdom of God.

7 Do not marvel that I said to you, '**You must be born again.**'

8 The **wind blows where it wishes**, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. **So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.**"

BELIEVE

- 12 If I have told you earthly things and **you do not believe,**
how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
- 13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.
- 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
- 15 that **whoever believes** in Him should not perish but have eternal life.
- 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes** in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
- 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.
- 18 “**He who believes** in Him is not condemned; but **he who does not believe** is condemned already, **because he has not believed** in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 3:12–18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Isa. 10

- “Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
And the staff in whose hand is My indignation.
- 6 I will send him against an ungodly nation,
And against the people of My wrath
I will give him charge,
To seize the spoil, to take the prey,

- And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.
- 7** Yet he does not mean so,
Nor does his heart think so;
But *it is* in his heart to destroy,
And cut off not a few nations.
- 8** For he says,
'*Are* not my princes altogether kings?
- 9** *Is* not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
- 10** As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols,
Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and
Samaria,
- 11** As I have done to Samaria and her idols,
Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?' ”
- 12** Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has
performed all His work on Mount Zion and on
Jerusalem, *that He will say*, “I will punish the fruit of the
arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his
haughty looks.”

The New King James Version. (1982). (Is 10:5–12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson

Acts 2:22

- 22** “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man
attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs
which God did through Him in your midst, as you
yourselves also know—
- 23** Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and
foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands,
have crucified, and put to death;

24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Ac 2:22–24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Acts 4:25

25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:
‘Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?

26 *The kings of the earth took their stand,*
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His Christ.’

27 “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together

28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Ac 4:25–28). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Romans 10

9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, “*Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.*”

- 12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.
- 13** For “*whoever calls* on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
- 14** How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?
- 15** And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:
*“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”*
- 16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?”
- 17** So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Ro 10:9–14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Romans 9:15

- 15** For He says to Moses, “*I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.*”
- 16** So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Ro 9:15–16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Review

Lesson

I. A Sure Testimony

11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if **I tell you heavenly things?**

13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

John 3:11. ἀμὴν, ἀμὴν ... οὐ λαμβάνετε. From this point dialogue ceases, and we have now an unbroken utterance of Jesus. It starts with a certification of the truth of what Nicodemus had professed himself unable to understand.

For the third time, Jesus introduces his statement with, “Truly, truly.” He is emphasizing the fact that His testimony is absolutely reliable and true. But that was precisely the problem with the Jewish leaders: Jesus’ testimony about God and the only way to have sins forgiven and get eternal life was an affront to their religious pride. They did not see themselves as sinners who needed a Savior (**John 8:33, 41;**

9:34). And so they rejected the true testimony of the only One who has come from heaven to earth to tell us how to be right with God.

There are a couple of difficulties to try to resolve in these verses. First, why does Jesus shift from the first person singular (“I say to you”) to the plural (“we speak of what we know...”) ? Probably it was because in Jewish thought, true testimony is established by two or three witnesses. In [John 5:31](#), Jesus tells the Jews, “If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true.” He meant that it would not be admissible as legal evidence. But He goes on to say that the Father testifies of Him, John the Baptist had testified of Him, Jesus’ works testified of Him, and the Scriptures testified of Him. Here in [John 3](#), Jesus may have been referring to the witness of John the Baptist or of the Father. But since He is rebuking Nicodemus for not knowing these things, I think that He is referring to the witness of the Old Testament prophets.

A second difficulty is, what does Jesus mean by “earthly things” and “heavenly things” (3:12)? I think that Calvin is on target when he says that Jesus is referring to His manner of teaching. He used two earthly illustrations, birth and the wind, to explain basic spiritual truth about receiving new life from God. If Nicodemus couldn’t understand these simple illustrations, how would he ever be able to understand if Jesus explained the Trinity or His incarnation or His substitutionary death for sinners?

A third difficulty is how do we read and understand verse 13: “No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man”? Some translations accept a textual variant that adds to “the Son of Man” the phrase, “who is in heaven.” Some scholars argue that it was in the original text because it is a difficult reading that no later scribe would have added. They contend that a later scribe may have dropped it to avoid the suggestion that Jesus was at that moment in heaven. But the majority of scholars think that a later scribe may have added it to reflect later Christological development (Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [United Bible Societies], pp. 174-175).

By His words in verse 13 Jesus is asserting that no one besides Him has ever ascended into heaven to be able to report heavenly truth on

earth. He alone has come down from heaven. By the “Son of Man,” He is saying that He is the one Daniel prophesied of in [Daniel 7:13-14](#), whom he saw in heaven with the Ancient of Days. Thus Jesus uniquely understands and can reveal heavenly mysteries. To reject Jesus’ witness is to reject God’s primary source for spiritual truth. We have that witness in the entire Bible, which tells us about Christ and points us to Him ([Luke 24:27, 44](#)).

Whitefield’s favorite Scripture became [John 3:3](#) (KJV), “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He went on to preach more than 18,000 sermons, often on that text, sometimes to outdoor crowds of over 20,000 people (with no microphone!). He made many trips to America and was used greatly in the First Great Awakening. In one of his final sermons, he said (*ibid.*, p. 70), “I am now fifty-five years of age and I tell you that I am more than ever convinced that the truth of ***the new birth is a revelation from God Himself***, and that without it you can never be saved by Jesus Christ.”

A friend asked him one day, “Why do you so often preach on *Ye must be born again?*”

“Because,” replied Whitefield solemnly, looking full into the face of the questioner, “because *ye must be born again!*”

II. A Sad Truth

11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

If you reject what Jesus is saying about your need for the new birth, you're arrogantly asserting that you know more about spiritual things than He does, even though He came down from heaven and knows what He's talking about.

But that was precisely the problem with the Jewish leaders: Jesus' testimony about God and the only way to have sins forgiven and get eternal life was an affront to their religious pride. They did not see themselves as sinners who needed a Savior ([John 8:33, 41; 9:34](#)). And so they rejected the true testimony of the only One who has come from heaven to earth to tell us how to be right with God.

The tragedy of Unbelief

[John 1:11](#)

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

[John 6:36](#)

"But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

box

[John 10:24-26](#)

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.

John 5:46-47

"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. "But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

box

John 8:45

"But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.

box

John 4:48

So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe."

John 12:37

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.

box

Hebrews 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

Mark 6:1-6

- 6:1** Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him.
- 2** And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing *Him* were astonished, saying, "Where *did* this Man *get* these things? And what wisdom *is* this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!"

- 3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” So they were offended at Him.
- 4 But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.”
- 5 Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed *them*.
- 6 And He marveled because of their unbelief.

The New King James Version. (1982). (Mk 6:1–6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Bible doesn't say that Jesus wondered, or was astonished, or was amazed except for two times...here and on an occasion when He was amazed at the faith of a centurion, as recorded both by Matthew and Luke. The Bible tells us the people were constantly amazed at Him. They were astonished at Him. But only those two times was He amazed at them. Once with the centurion He was amazed at his faith. Here He is amazed at the **unbelief** in His own hometown.

We think about faith as powerful, don't we? Faith moves mountains. But I want you to understand that **unbelief** is powerful as well. **Unbelief** is a great force. The power of **unbelief** is so great that it extends throughout all eternity. In fact, it has massive force, **unbelief** does.

For example, Eve exercised **unbelief** in the Word of God and brought the entire human race down into a curse and eternal judgment. In the days of Noah, Noah was a preacher of righteousness warning the world, the world would not believe and the world of unbelievers brought down a Flood upon their own heads that drowned all of humanity with the exception of Noah and his three sons and their wives and his own wife. **Unbelief** caused the destruction of the whole human race and all creatures and all life living on the earth. It was **unbelief** on the part of Israel

in the wilderness that caused them to die there before ever entering into the Promised Land. And the story of Israel's ongoing **unbelief** even after they entered the land of Canaan is clear for all to read in the Old Testament. They were judged again and again by God for their apostasy and their unbelief.

Being a little more individual and looking at the power of unbelief, we remember Aaron's **unbelief** led to three thousand people being slaughtered. We remember that Moses' **unbelief** kept him out of the Promised Land. We remember that Achan's **unbelief** resulting in his disobedience brought about the execution of himself and his entire family. You might remember Sennacherib's unbelief, the Gentile king, led to his assassination by his own sons after an angel of the Lord had massacred 185 thousand of his troops.

And, of course, there is the **unbelief** of Judas which led to his suicide and his everlasting punishment. The Pharisees and the scribes were unbelievers to the very end with few exceptions. And like all other unbelievers, their **unbelief** resulted in them dying in their sins and forfeiting heaven and gaining hell.

"John MacArthur"

John 8:24

24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."

The New King James Version. (1982). (Jn 8:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Conclusion

Charles Templeton (1915-2001) first professed faith in 1936 and became an evangelist that same year. In 1945 he met Billy

Graham and the two became friends, rooming and ministering together during a 1946 YFC evangelistic tour in Europe.

But by 1948 Templeton's life and worldview were beginning to go in a different direction than Graham's. Doubts about the Christian faith were solidifying as he planned to enter Princeton Theological Seminary. Less than a decade later (1957), he would publicly declare that he had become an agnostic.

In his 1996 memoir, Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith, Templeton recounted a conversation with Graham in Montreal prior to entering seminary:

All our differences came to a head in a discussion which, better than anything I know, "explains" Billy Graham and his phenomenal success as an evangelist.

In the course of our conversation I said, "But, Billy, it's simply not possible any longer to believe, for instance, the biblical account of creation. The world was not created over a period of days a few thousand years ago; it has evolved over millions of years. It's not a matter of speculation; it's a demonstrable fact."

"I don't accept that," Billy said. "And there are reputable scholars who don't."

"Who are these scholars?" I said. "Men in conservative Christian colleges?"

"Most of them, yes," he said. "But that is not the point. I believe the Genesis account of creation because it's in the Bible. I've discovered something in my ministry: When I take the Bible literally, when I proclaim it as the word of God, my preaching has power. When I stand on the platform and say, 'God says,' or 'The Bible says,' the Holy Spirit uses me. There are results. Wiser men than you or I have been arguing questions like this for centuries. I don't have the time or the intellect to examine all sides of the

theological dispute, so I've decided once for all to stop questioning and accept the Bible as God's word."

"But Billy," I protested, "You cannot do that. You don't dare stop thinking about the most important question in life. Do it and you begin to die. It's intellectual suicide."

"I don't know about anybody else," he said, "but I've decided that that's the path for me."

Their trajectories had been chosen.

Fifty years later, Lee Strobel had an opportunity to interview Templeton, who had just a couple of more years to live. He was in his 80s and suffering from Alzheimer's, but still a clear conversation partner. In *A Case for Faith*, Strobel recounts the ending of their wide-ranging conversation.

"And how do you assess this Jesus?" It seemed like the next logical question—but I wasn't ready for the response it would evoke.

Templeton's body language softened. It was as if he suddenly felt relaxed and comfortable in talking about an old and dear friend. His voice, which at times had displayed such a sharp and insistent edge, now took on a melancholy and reflective tone. His guard seemingly down, he spoke in an unhurried pace, almost nostalgically, carefully choosing his words as he talked about Jesus.

"He was," Templeton began, "the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my readings. His commitment was total and led to his own death, much to the detriment of the world. What could one say about him except that this was a form of greatness?"

I was taken aback. "You sound like you really care about him," I said.

“Well, yes, he is the most important thing in my life,” came his reply. “I . . . I . . . I . . . ,” he stuttered, searching for the right word, ‘I know it may sound strange, but I have to say . . . I adore him!’ . . .

” . . . Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. Yes . . . yes. And tough! Just look at Jesus. He castigated people. He was angry. People don’t think of him that way, but they don’t read the Bible. He had a righteous anger. He cared for the oppressed and exploited. There’s no question that he had the highest moral standard, the least duplicity, the greatest compassion, of any human being in history. There have been many other wonderful people, but Jesus is Jesus....’

“Uh . . . but . . . no,’ he said slowly, ‘he’s the most . . .” He stopped, then started again. “In my view,” he declared, “he is the most important human being who has ever existed.”

That’s when Templeton uttered the words I never expected to hear from him. “And if I may put it this way,” he said as his voice began to crack, ‘I . . . miss . . . him!’

With that tears flooded his eyes. He turned his head and looked downward, raising his left hand to shield his face from me. His shoulders bobbed as he wept. . . .

Templeton fought to compose himself. I could tell it wasn’t like him to lose control in front of a stranger. He sighed deeply and wiped away a tear. After a few more awkward moments, he waved his hand dismissively. Finally, quietly but adamantly, he insisted: “Enough of that.”