

Sola Fide: By Faith Alone!

Psalm 46 Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-25a John 8:31-36

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When you think about the **Lutheran Reformation**, one of the easiest ways to think about it is with the phrase “*Sola Fide*” -- *by faith alone*. That was one of the ways that the Reformers’ summarized their differences with the Roman Catholic Church. “*Sola Fide*” -- *by faith alone* -- is the biblical way of saying that we are saved by faith alone and not by our own works¹. Faith is a gift from God where He connects you to the Savior Jesus Christ and all of the blessings of His life, death, and resurrection for you.

In the Reformation era, the Roman Catholic Church was teaching that salvation depended on you. Their doctrine teaches that Holy Baptism brings you into the Christian faith, but if you sin after Baptism, it is up to you to make up for your sin. So they have an elaborate system of works, worship, prayers, suffering, and even the payment of money to make up for your sin and to set yourself right with God again.² In this system of works righteousness, there is no assurance, nor confidence, of salvation. You never know if you have done enough works to satisfy God and make up for your sin. You have no peace of

¹ In theology, these phrases are called “Exclusive Particles.” They are the words that the NT uses whereby the works of men are excluded; such as *without Law, without works, by grace, freely, alone* – see examples in Romans 3:28; 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9

² This elaborate system of “works for righteousness” can be summarized under these five categories: Indulgences, Penance, Mass, Praying to the Saints (including Mary), and Purgatory. These five categories remain the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In this understanding, Jesus gives you some grace to help you do your part to earn your salvation (infused grace), but it depends on you to finish the work. The phrase “God helps those who help themselves” comes from this false teaching.

mind. You always live under a cloud of guilt because there is no objective truth to bring you peace; they give no promise that God loves you in Christ and freely forgives your sins by grace alone through faith alone.

In contrast to this, Martin Luther and the Reformers learned of God's free gift of salvation that comes through *faith alone*. The Holy Scriptures boldly proclaim this truth in many and various ways. On this Reformation Sunday, let's review some of these great promises!

For by *grace* you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2:16

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Romans 3:28

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. John 5:25

And be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— Philippians 3:9

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

All of these verses are teaching us that our salvation is dependent on God, and not on ourselves. If our salvation depended upon ourselves, we all would have ruined it long ago. We disobey God and His law every day in multiple ways; and we are unloving and unkind to the people around us. When you are honest with yourself, it is easy to see why salvation is not dependent on your own good works, good thoughts, or good words.

Salvation is dependent on Christ, the perfect Son of God, Who's good life and good death saves us from our sin. He lives a perfect life for you, and He paid for your sins in His death on the cross, so that you are saved, forgiven, and at peace with God. He is the Savior, and salvation is His free gift to us. He creates the faith within us so that we know that this is true and that we are included. That faith is His work; *"Sola Fide"* -- *by faith alone* -- emphasizes that it is not our work but God's work that saves us³.

Men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight.

Augsburg Confession Article 4

Because God is solely responsible for our salvation, and it is not dependent on us in any way shape or form, we can have total **confidence** and absolute **assurance** of the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and eternal life. It truly is a gift that God has given to us, and God will not take that gift away from you.

That **assurance and confidence** means that you live each day in peace; peace with God, peace with yourself, and peace with others. You do not have to live under a cloud of guilt; you do not have to be afraid of the Lord your God; you do not have to wonder what God's attitude is towards you! He is loving and gracious and kind to you every moment of every day of your life because of His Son Jesus Christ! Through faith in Christ you have **assurance and confidence** of His love, care, and compassion!

³ A helpful phrase to remember is "Divine Monergism". "Divine Monergism" means "God's one work alone" --> and it is a way to describe salvation as totally God's work and not ours. The term that's used to describe the false teachers who attribute a portion of the work of salvation to themselves is "Synergism" (working together). Synergists work with God to save themselves. Of course, that is a false teaching!

The truth that salvation is by *faith alone* in the Lord Jesus Christ is the message that we proclaim as conservative Lutheran Christians. It is like God has given to us the gift of salvation that we can give to other people. It is objective, it really is the truth that we can proclaim to all people. The truth of Christ does not change because people reject Him. From missionaries in foreign mission fields to our congregation here in Litchfield Park, to your personal witness to your family and friends, **we proclaim the same truth**: salvation is a gift that God gives by *faith alone*. God is not waiting for people to do their part; He has already done 100% of the work through His Son Jesus Christ! *As conservative Lutheran Christians, we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

Finally, as we celebrate the **Lutheran Reformation** today, we are reminded that this is exactly what the Reformation was about. This is why we are conservative Lutherans. We believe, teach, and confess that *we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified and kept us in the true faith.*

- ✓ Christ has set us free from trying to earn our own salvation
- ✓ Christ has set us free from living under a cloud of guilt and despair
- ✓ Christ has freely forgiven our sins, given us peace with God, and assures us of a home in heaven.

This is why we are conservative Lutherans; this is exactly what the Bible teaches from start to finish; this is the gospel good news of eternal salvation!

We hold that a man is justified by faith alone apart from any works of his own! Amen!