

## The Five Solas: *Sola Fide*

Galatians 2:11-21

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on October 1, 2017

### Introduction

- ❖ When we think about the heroes of the Reformation, we have in mind individuals like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Thomas Cranmer, John Knox. And they all have one thing in common. They're all men. The stories we tell of the Reformation tend to be their stories, but there are other unsung heroes – I should say heroines – of the Reformation.
  - I want to introduce you to **Lady Jane Grey**. She's very much connected to the story I told you a couple weeks ago about Bloody Mary – who ascended the throne with the intent of making England a Catholic nation once again by undoing the Reformational changes instituted by her half-brother King Edward VI. Edward was a boy when crowned king and only reigned six years before dying, most likely of tuberculosis.
  
- ❖ But between the reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, there was actually another ruler of England – the '**Nine Day Queen**' as history knows her – the Lady Jane Grey. A first cousin to Edward VI, she was only sixteen years old when she became part of a larger plot to ensure that a Protestant would remain on the throne. But her counselors underestimated the fact that the English people cared more for a legitimate monarch than a Protestant one. **So when Mary arrived in London with an entire army behind her, she had little trouble deposing Jane Grey and locking her up in the Tower of London.**
  - Now I've already talked about the reign of terror under Bloody Mary where almost three hundred Protestants were burned at the stake. But when it came to Lady Jane Grey, Mary offered mercy assuming she was a mere pawn in the plot of others. If Lady Jane would renounce her Protestant convictions and take the Catholic Mass, her life would be spared. But Mary and everyone else underestimated Lady Jane Grey. They discovered she was a committed, well-spoken Reformer in her own right.
  
- ❖ **After her arrest, she was publicly interrogated by Mary's archbishop John Feckenham before an audience of Catholic supporters.** It was an extremely intimidating setting for a sixteen year old girl, but Lady Jane held her own. She argued winsomely against the Catholic view of the Lord's Supper and made a compelling case for *Sola Scriptura*.
  - When Feckenham raised the issue of justification and accused her and the Reformers of rejecting the role of good works in the life of the Christian, she responded with great clarity and conviction. She said, "*I affirm that faith only saves; but it is meet (fitting) for a Christian to do good works, in token (as a sign) that he follows the steps of his Master, Christ, yet may we not say that we profit (add) to our salvation; for when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, and faith only in Christ's blood saves us.*" Luther couldn't have said it any better.
    - On February 12, 1554 Lady Jane Grey was beheaded. Her last words were, "*I here die a true Christian woman and I trust to be saved by the blood of Christ, and by none other means.*"

- ❖ That's the kind of sixteen year old I hope my daughter grows up to be. **I wonder how many sixteen year olds here aspire to have the same courage rooted in the same convictions?** Convictions that say, *"I affirm faith only saves. . . faith only in Christ's blood saves us."*
  - Lady Jane Grey proclaimed *Sola Fide* to the literal end of her life. It means faith alone. Faith alone in Christ alone. That was her hope. That was her strength. That was her courage. **I tell you her story so you can see the practical effects and the death-defying power of believing in and living out *Sola Fide*.**
    - As we continue our series on *The Five Solas* – the five slogans that sum up the gospel the Reformers sought to reclaim and restore for the Church – we're going to focus on *Sola Fide* and consider its theological claims as well as its practical effects, and we'll do that by turning to a passage in Galatians 2.

### ***Sola Fide* Defined**

- ❖ I'm going to begin by defining *Sola Fide* for us, and then we'll consider three applications found in our text. I should explain from the outset that *Sola Fide* is really just another way of saying **justification by faith alone**. Now I don't want to just give a textbook definition. I want to let Paul define terms for us, so I need to spend some time laying out the context.
  - The Apostle Paul is writing to churches that he planted a few years back in the ancient region of Galatia in Asia Minor. He was up against theological opponents who arrived after him preaching another gospel. These false teachers were devout Jews who accepted Christ as the Messiah, but even so they embraced a different gospel – one that did not include justification by faith alone.
- ❖ They were known as **Judaizers**, which comes from the term 'to judaize'. It's like how we say 'to Christianize' someone. You see, these teachers weren't against giving the gospel to Gentiles. **But they figured if you're going to put your hope of salvation in a Jewish Messiah – then you should become Jewish.**
  - A Judaizer would argue that for Gentiles to be saved and to be part of God's covenant community, they must not only accept Jesus as the Messiah but also submit to the Law of Moses. You should convert to Judaism, observing all the moral *and* ceremonial aspects of the law. That would include receiving circumcision. It's a high cost, but if you're serious about faith you'll do it.
- ❖ **So you can also see why these Judaizers were accusing Paul of watering down the gospel for the sake of Gentiles.** They were accusing him of trying to please man (1:10) by leaving out the costly expectations of the Law to makes his gospel easier to accept.
  - That's why in chapter 1 Paul has to argue that there's only one gospel (1:6-9), and it's the gospel he taught them in the beginning. And he spills so much ink in chapter 1 recounting his own testimony. He's saying, "If you know my biography, you know a Pharisaical zealot like me would be the last person to set aside the Law of God in order to please people. But I met Jesus himself and he taught me otherwise." (1:12)

- ❖ Then in chapter 2, he tells of a time when he was living in Antioch (a Gentile city) and how these same Judaizers showed up teaching their false gospel, claiming it was in line with the apostles in Jerusalem. So Paul made a trip to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:1-35) to make sure that the church there was not teaching another gospel and opposing his ministry to the Gentiles.
  - He says, in v6, that it pleased him to know they were preaching the same gospel. He says how James, Peter, and John extended the righthand of fellowship and entrusted him with the gospel to the Gentiles while they took the same gospel to the Jews.
  
- ❖ **Now when we get to v11, Paul describes a time when he had to publicly confront Peter – not for denying the gospel – but for not living in step with the truth of the gospel.** When Peter first arrived in Antioch, he had no problem sharing table-fellowship with Gentile Christians. He had his own revelation earlier in Acts 10 where Jesus taught him not to call unclean anyone whom God has made clean (10:15, 28).
  - So Peter knew full well that Gentile believers were considered clean and accepted by God through faith alone in Christ alone – without circumcision, without keeping kosher, etc. And yet when certain men came from James (from Jerusalem), Peter drew back and began to separate himself from the Gentile members of the church.
  
- ❖ We're told why he did it. Paul says in v12 that it's because he feared the circumcision party. So it was out of fear. **But what's not clear is the fear of what? What was Peter scared of?** Now he could've been scared of the men from James. That is, he feared their opinion, their intimidation, their threats. That would assume the 'certain men from James' are one and the same as 'the circumcision party', who are also the Judaizers.
  
- ❖ But I find that interpretation hard to believe considering how Peter was already confronted by the circumcision party back in Acts 11 for eating with Gentiles. And there he boldly defended his actions in a manner that would've made Paul proud. **So why would he, in a similar situation, suddenly grow fearful and cave in to the same pressures he once withstood?**
  - That's why some commentators say that the 'men from James' were not 'the circumcision party'. They didn't come to confront but to warn. **They were sent by James to warn Peter of the negative impact their table-fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch was having on Jewish believers in Jerusalem.** The idea is the circumcision party refers to a band of zealous Pharisaical Jews who were increasingly hostile to the Jerusalem church as rumors increased of these Jewish Christians in other cities would dare fellowship with the uncircumcised.
  
- ❖ **So Peter feared the circumcision party in that he feared what they might do to believers in Jerusalem.** That's a more likely reason why Peter would withdraw table-fellowship in Antioch. **But regardless of the exact motivation, his actions implicitly agreed with the Judaizers' claim that Gentile believers are not part of God's people until they become law-observing Jews.** Even though Peter knows they're his brothers and sisters in Christ, he's treating them like they're still unclean 'Gentile sinners'. That's hypocritical. Paul calls it out.

- ❖ **Now notice how the issue at hand is cleanliness – whether someone is ceremonially clean according to Mosaic law.** Are these Gentile believers clean in the eyes of God without circumcision? That's the big question. And take note that there's both a vertical and horizontal element involved. **If you're deemed clean and accepted vertically in the eyes of God then you're considered clean and accepted horizontally by God's people.** That's the blessing of being ceremonially clean.
  
- ❖ But then in v16, Paul switches terminology. **Instead of being clean, he starts talking about being justified.** This is important. If we're going to define justification according to Paul in Galatians, then we have to see its connection with being declared clean. And it has to do with acceptance on both a vertical and horizontal level.
  - **To be justified is like being declared 'clean' and accepted vertically in the eyes of God, and therefore you're considered 'clean' and accepted horizontally by the people of God.** Being clean and being justified are both about how God sees you and how that effects how God's people see you.
    - So they're connected, but they are still distinct ways of describing our salvation. **Cleanliness is a term more suited for the temple, while justification is found in the courtroom.** In the temple, you're declared clean by a priest. In the court, you're declared righteous (justified) by a judge.
  
- ❖ I think these differences led Paul to switch terms. Justification communicates more than cleanliness. Think about it. **When God calls you clean, he's only referring to your present state with no view to the past.** You could've been filthy yesterday but if you observe the Law and ceremonially wash, we can call you clean today. **So you're clean but you still have a record – a reputation of having been filthy.** But this is where justification goes further.
  - When God calls you righteous (justified), he's referring to your present state *and* your past record. In justification, God not only doesn't count our sins against us – he counts Jesus's righteous record/reputation towards us (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). **We're declared righteous not just in terms of having washed up clean but having never been filthy in the first place.** We're brand new!
  
- ❖ I think we all know the difference. Let's say there's this shirt or skirt or pair of shoes, that you've been really wanting. And you finally purchase it. But the first time you wear it out, it get stained. It gets dirty. Now all is not lost. You can wash it. Now let's say you do a really good job and it's totally clean again. **It's spotless – but it's not new.** It's not the same as it once was. It has a past, a record of having been dirty. Which affects its value.
  - It's the same with all these homes being repaired after the flood. You can fix all the damages. You can remodel the entire home. Give it a new coat of paint and fill it with new furniture. But that house has a past. It has a flood history. Which affects its value.

- ❖ **If God's salvation only consisted of cleansing us from sin, we would still carry a past.** We would have a history, a record of having once been covered with the filth of sin. Praise God your sins would be washed away and forgiven. But you would still carry around the reputation (the identity) of a dirty sinner who cleans up good.
  - The devil would love nothing better than to remind you that you're nothing more, at the core, than a dirty sinner who cleaned up. He'll tell you, "Sure you're clean but you're flawed. You've got a past, a history, that affects your value. You're worthless."
  
- ❖ **What we need in addition to cleansing is justification.** We need the sinless righteousness of Christ imputed to us. We need his spotless reputation counted as ours in order to counter the devil. And that is a gift freely offered in the gospel! We are "*justified in Christ*" (v17). **We stand before God in union with Christ where his righteous record has become ours.**
  - And the point is that this gift of righteousness is truly a gift – not something you receive by works of the law but through faith alone. V16 says, "*yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ*". **In other words, no one is declared right and accepted by God based on what we do for God – but only through faith in what God has done for us in Christ.** If you try to add works to justification, you're preaching a different gospel.
  
- ❖ Alistair Begg is known for saying: A Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted. **A Christ supplemented by circumcision (by law-keeping) is a Christ supplanted by circumcision (by law-keeping).** Later in chapter 5:2, Paul says that if you accept circumcision, "*Christ will be of no advantage to you. <sup>3</sup>I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.*"
  - In other words, you can't just stop at circumcision. **You give an inch and the law will take a mile. You require one stipulation of the law; you'll have to keep the whole thing.** If you try to supplement the gospel, you end up supplanting the gospel. You give people a false gospel that offers a false hope since no one is righteous enough to keep the whole law. So you lead people to despair and eternal destruction.
    - This is why Paul is so incredulous towards Peter. Why would you give Gentile Christians the impression that they need to be circumcised – that they need to keep the law as a means to be accepted by God and God's people? You know it's impossible. That it only leads to death.
  
- ❖ The gospel preaches *Sola Fide*. **God declares you righteous (in regard to your entire past) and accepts you into his covenant community not by what you do for him – but only by trusting in what he has done for you through Christ Jesus.** He sent Jesus to live the life you should've lived; to die the death you deserve to die; so that if you trust in him and him alone – you are justified. You are accepted by God.

## ***Sola Fide* Applied**

- ❖ That's *Sola Fide* defined. And many of you already believe that, but do you live it out? Have we applied *Sola Fide* in our lives, in our church? What I want to do with the remainder of our time is to help you apply this doctrine in three ways.
  
- ❖ **First, I want to show you how justification by faith alone cuts at the very roots of ethnocentrism.** This is where Peter failed to apply his theology. His convictions said one thing, but his conduct said another. It says in v14 that his actions were “*not in step with the truth of the gospel*”. The phrase literally translates as ‘not ortho-walking’ (straight-walking). **Peter’s walk was not aligned with his talk.** His conduct did not align with his convictions. In fact, his conduct contradicted his convictions.
  - By withdrawing table-fellowship, by refusing to accept a Christian horizontally, you’re rejecting the reality of God’s acceptance of them vertically. Racism and ethnocentrism are direct denials of justification by faith alone.
  
- ❖ **Because if you truly believe in *Sola Fide*, then you’re saying anybody can be accepted by God simply by trusting in Jesus.** They’re justified without consideration of how religious or righteous they are in the present or how wicked or sinful they were in the past. They’re justified without consideration of their gender, skin color, nationality, or cultural background. **A Christian has no defining characteristics save this alone – that that individual is repenting of his/her sins and trusting in Christ alone for salvation.** So everyone is to be loved and valued because anyone can be saved and justified by faith alone.
  
- ❖ Now Peter would’ve agreed. He would’ve said, “I share those convictions. I’m no racist.” But his conduct said otherwise. And that’s where I want us to pause and evaluate our own conduct, not necessarily our convictions. I believe you when you say you believe *Sola Fide*, when you say you’re no racist. But how do you conduct yourself and what does that say?
  - This is where we have a corporate and personal responsibility. **As a corporate body, we, as a congregation, should make every effort to communicate that our communion table (our Christian fellowship) is open to all who turn from sin and trust in Jesus.** Now our Chinese congregations, by virtue of their particular mission to the immigrant community, will have a table that reflects one culture more than others. That’s to be expected and affirmed based on their mission. But let’s work hard (and pray harder) that our communion table reflects more of the diversity that God has put in our own lives outside the walls of this church.
    - And on a personal level – for members of the English *and* Chinese side – let’s ask ourselves: **When was the last time I shared table-fellowship in my own home with someone of another race or culture?** I know you’re not a racist. I know you believe in *Sola Fide*. So let your life, your conduct, reflect it.

- ❖ **Second, I want to stress that justification by faith alone offers no justification for a continual life of sin.** That's what the Catholic Church said of the Reformers and their instances on justification by faith alone. They said if justification is by faith alone without view to good works then why would anyone pursue good works? If God justifies the bad then what's the point of being good? That's what the Catholic Church thought about *Sola Fide*. In fact, Paul's opponents argued something similar.
  - Look at v17, "*17But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.*" The Judaizers accused Paul's gospel of making Christ the author of sin or at least the encourager of sin. **But Paul says in v18 that if I continue to sin after my justification, it's my fault.** Blame me, not Christ.
  
- ❖ **But then he goes on to explain in vv19-20 that the gospel he preaches not only involves a change of status (from condemned to righteous) but a change of nature (from old to new, from death to life).** Listen to this language of dying and then living a new life in Christ found in vv19-20. "*19For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*"
  - In other words, I'm only justified because I'm a new creation – I'm a new man in Christ. **God only justifies those he has made new by a new birth.** Our justification and our regeneration are distinct but inseparable categories describing our salvation.
  
- ❖ So my point is that with a new regenerate heart comes new desires and motives where we want to obey God and do good. **Martin Luther once quipped that justification is by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone.** True saving faith is always accompanied by obedience and good works. Because through new eyes of faith we see Jesus as a Master we want to obey, as a Friend we want to please. Why would I continue in my sin? Why would I not want to obey? He's the Son of God "*who loved me and gave himself for me.*" (v20)
  - This is why I so appreciate the way Paul rebuked Peter. He didn't just call Peter's behavior 'wicked' and 'racist'. No, he calls his behavior out of step with the gospel that he knows Peter believes. **This is a good model for us when we confront a fellow brother or sister who's living in sin.** If I just call out your sin, then I'm just condemning. But if I help you see that at the root of your problems is a lack of faith in the Jesus in whom you believe – not recognizing or remembering how much he loves you and all that he has done for you in life and death – if I help you see that, then I give you the actual strength to change.
  
- ❖ This leads to my third and final application: **Justification by faith alone fuels worship for the One who gave himself for you.** Look at v21, "*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*" I take that to mean if justification could be achieved by our own work, then that makes Christ's work totally unnecessary. It makes his brutal death on the cross quite a senseless act of violence.

- ❖ Just picture with me. You're walking along a river bank with a friend, and you happen to slip and fall into the river, which has a strong current that pulls you away. But you're an excellent swimmer and you immediately begin to swim perpendicular to the current and you're making your way back to shore. But before you get there, your friend jumps in, grabs you and pushes you to shore, but in so doing he's pulled away by the current and drowns. Now I'm sure you'll appreciate the gesture. **You'll feel loved but mostly you'll feel confused.** Why did he sacrifice himself? It was unnecessary. It was senseless. I could've made it myself.
  - Now let me change one important aspect of the story. Imagine the same scenario but for the fact that you don't know how to swim. You are entirely helpless in that river and doomed to die. **If that were the case, then your friend's sacrifice would feel like the epitome of love. It would change you forever.** You would never stop from the rest of your life honoring your friend, telling everyone you meet about what he did to save your life.
  
- ❖ Church, do you see why *Sola Fide* matters? "*If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*" If you could've saved yourself by works of the law, then Christ's death was unnecessary and senseless. **But if you were entirely helpless and doomed to die under the weight of your sins, then Jesus's sacrifice for you becomes everything.** And you'll spend the rest of your life giving your everything in worship and service to the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you.