

Sola Fide (Genesis 15:1-6; Galatians 2:11-16 & Galatians 3:1-14)

01-Oct-2017

So we begin our 5 part series on the Protestant Reformation - as we celebrate and remember the Reformation which began 500 years ago.

Before we start - let me pray for God's wisdom, guidance and understanding first

Intro/Faith Alone

One of the main things that came out of the Reformation was a new understanding of how our sin and rebellion against God is dealt with - how we are made into a right relationship with God again - and how we should live lives that are pleasing to God...

So the Reformers came up with 5 Solas - Sola is Latin for only or alone

So they came up with 5 Only's or 5 Alones - 5 Solas...

[Powerpoint 1-5 Solas]

Sola Scriptura - Scripture Alone

Sola Gratia - Grace Alone

Sola Fide - Faith Alone

Solus Christus - Christ Alone

Soli Deo Gloria - Glory to God Alone

Over the next 5 Sundays - we will look at one of these Solas

Today we are going to look at Sola Fide - Faith Alone

(pause)

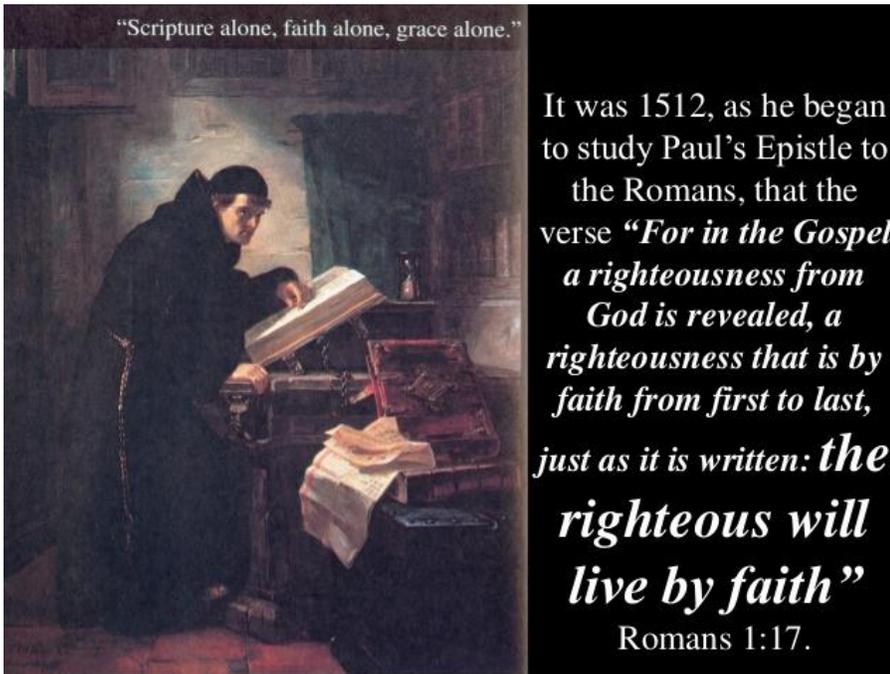
[Powerpoint 2-Question]

So one of the basic questions at the time of the Reformation was: "How is a person saved from their sin and rebellion against God and made right with God? Is it by being "good" or by "keeping the commandments"; or "doing everything that the Church and the Pope and the Priest say"; or by "going to confession"; or "keeping the Sacraments of the church" or all of the above?

German Monk - Martin Luther had a breakthrough moment - and discovered that Scripture says we are saved and made right by with God - by faith alone - He got this from Romans 1:17

[Powerpoint 3-Faith/Martin]

¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."



Sola Fide* or *Faith Alone became one of the 5 catch cries of the Reformation

So what is Faith?

[Powerpoint 4-Faith Definition]

Dictionary definition is:

Strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof

Definition from the Bible is:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 1:1)

Basically - believing God’s promises without seeing them!

There's a story of a little 3 year old boy who went down to the beach with His Dad to fly a kite for the first time. The little boy was doubtful his kite would fly but His Dad assured him all would go well and the kite would go up into the sky as planned. As the little boy unraveled the string of the kite - he watched as the kite went up up high into the sky

He turned to his Dad and said "I knew it would fly Daddy! You said it would!"

(pause)

That's what faith is - it's us saying I know it's true, Father God - because you said so - no proof necessary

But faith in what?

The church?

Ourselves?

Priests?

Our Family?

Our Friends?

None of the above!

But Faith in God's Son Jesus

[Powerpoint 5-Faith in what?]

Having faith in the statement from John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Having faith in the statement from Romans 10:9-10

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

So returning to the Bible's definition from Hebrews 11:1

faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see

It means having faith in Jesus' death giving us forgiveness and making us right with God - and having faith in Jesus' resurrection giving us the rock solid guarantee of eternal life with God in Heaven - even though we can't see Jesus or see Heaven!

Abraham's Faith (Genesis 15:1-6)

If we are made right with God again through faith in Jesus

[Powerpoint 6-Abraham]

What about the people in the Old Testament - Jesus wasn't on Earth then - how were the people in the Old Testament made right with God.

Let's have a look at our OT passage from Genesis 15 - verses 1 to 6

Please turn there now...

In this passage God speaks to the OT character - Abram

And God promises Abram a son - even though Abram is over 90 years old at this stage and God also promises Abram will have many descendants - too many descendants to count - as many as the number of stars in the sky!

Now Abram had his doubts initially when God said he would have a son

But when God explained that Abram would have so many descendants - they couldn't be counted

What did Abram do?

He believed

And verse 6 says - Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to Him as righteousness

What that means is Abram's faith made him right with God!

So people in the OT are made right with God in the same way as the NT

By having faith!

If we know about Abram's story in the OT

We know Abram was promised - land, many descendants and blessings

We know Abram left the land he was living in at age 75 - and had faith in God's promises - even though he didn't live to see all the promises fulfilled...

We know Abram had faith in God's promise that he would receive a son

And even though Abram and Sarah tried to help God - by Abraham sleeping with his slave girl - Hagar

God's promise was still true - and Abraham and Sarah had a son Isaac

And if we doubt Abraham's faith

We need to remember in Genesis 22 - when God tests Abraham's faith - and tells him to sacrifice his only Son - Isaac - Abraham has faith in God - and says in v8 - the Lord Himself will provide a lamb - for the sacrifice - and spare His son, Isaac. That's amazing faith on Abraham's part!

So that's how the people of the OT are made right with God - by Faith in God.

When you go home today - check out Hebrews chapter 11

It lists a whole heap of OT characters who are an example of faith:

Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel

By faith the people of Israel passed through the Red Sea

By faith the people marched around Jericho - and the walls came tumbling down...

Do we have faith like there's - trusting what they can't necessarily touch or see or explain? But trusting God anyway!

(pause)

Everyone saved the same way (Galatians 2:11-16)

One of the other challenges the Reformers had was that that the Roman Catholic church at the time was teaching that people could contribute to making themselves right with God - by doing things like following church traditions, and buying pieces of paper from the church called indulgences - which were supposed

to reduce the amount of punishment for a person's sins - and reduce the time that departed loved ones might spend in a place call purgatory - having their sins cleansed.

[Powerpoint 7a]

The problem with that teaching is that it wasn't in the Bible

We can't work our way to be right with God

Romans 3:23 says

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

We can't work our way to be right with God because we are all sinners and we all fall short of God's perfect standards

Which is why we need Jesus to make us right with God

And we also can't ADD to what Jesus did to make us right with God

Which is the problem the Apostle Paul encounters in our 2nd reading from Galatians 2 - verses 11 to 16

Please turn there now

In this passage Paul clashes with the Apostle Peter

Peter's being a bit of hypocrite

Peter, a Jew, hangs out with the Gentiles (non-Jews) and has dinner with them

But when Peter's Jewish mates turn up - He pretends that he doesn't hang out with the Gentiles - so he doesn't get in trouble from his Jewish mates

And worse still when the other Jews saw Peter's hypocrisy they joined in with it!

But Paul challenges Peter on his double standards

And Paul points out to Peter in v14

"If you, a Jew, live like a non-Jew when you're not being observed by your Jewish mates from Jerusalem, what right do you have to require Gentiles (non-Jews) to conform to all the Jewish customs just to make a favorable impression on your old Jerusalem cronies?"

Paul's point is that following all the Jewish traditions and customs - which are WORKS - is not going to get you right with God -

[Powerpoint 7b]

He says in v16

a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ... because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Justified here means - being made right with God - to be declared by God as righteous and not guilty of sin

And Paul says people are not justified by the work they do - or any work they add to what Jesus has done - but they are justified by faith in Jesus

Justified by faith

Just-as-if- we have never sinned!

Everyone saved the same way! By Faith Alone! Sola Fide. Martin Luther would say!

Galatians 3:1-14 - Faith or Works

Moving on to our 3rd reading today.

From Galatians chapter 3

Please turn there now

(pause)

[Powerpoint 8-Galatians 3:1-14]

The Apostle Paul has a go at the Galatians - calling them foolish in verse 1 - because they haven't quite understood what Jesus achieved by dying on the cross - and they are trying to work their way to forgiveness and to be right with God and work their way to eternal life in Heaven

So Paul challenges them in verse 2 to 5

By asking how did they receive the Holy Spirit living inside them?

By works of the Law or by believing in Jesus?

In other words by Faith or by Works?

Paul even uses Abraham as an example in verse 6 and 7

Abraham got right with God - by His faith!

Not by anything he did!

And He says we're all children of Abraham by having that same faith

Then Paul says something pretty mind blowing in verse 8

That God gave an advanced screening of the Gospel to Abraham

Remember what the Gospel is

The Good News about Jesus

And that Good News was given to Abraham - thousands of years before Jesus was even born

The message was that all nations would be blessed through Abraham

Through faith in one of Abraham's descendants - JESUS

And Paul is saying we are all children of Abraham if we have the same faith as him!

So he has a go at the Galatians because they're trying to either work their own way to be right with God or trying to add to what Jesus has done

He says that there is a problem with the Law of God - in that people can't continue to keep every single commandment - none of us can - and so Paul says - we are cursed - in v10 - because we can't keep God's Law

So what's the point of God's Law if no one can keep it and everyone who doesn't keep it is cursed?

Well the point of the God's Law - is to show us a) what is right and wrong - just like the road rules show us how to drive properly - and b) it shows our need for someone to obey the law for us - and get us right with God - and that someone is Jesus

That's why Paul gives us the solution to the curse of the law in verse 13

Paul says - Jesus took the curse of the law on Himself by hanging on a tree crucified

He paid the "speeding fine" for us - so to speak - he paid the penalty for sin - by His death.

Paul uses the word redeemed - He says - Jesus bought us back from the dead - the price was Jesus' life

Why did Jesus do that?

Paul tells us in verse 14 - so that the blessings and promises God gave to Abraham would also come to us Gentiles - you and me!

How do we receive that blessing from God?

Still in v14 - by faith in Jesus

And what do we receive?

Not only forgiveness and eternal life in the future

But right now our faith in Jesus - Paul says - gives us the Holy Spirit

Which every believer who has put their faith in Jesus receives

So the bottom line is again the same

Everyone saved the same way! By Faith Alone! Sola Fide!

But What about Works? (James 2:14-26)

Now it's all very well for someone to say

I have faith in Jesus

And then stay at home

Never open their Bible, never pray, never come to church, never do anything for anyone and never show any love to God or others

And then say - I have faith in Jesus

Is that okay?

(pause)

Of course it's not!

Let's be clear what we have learnt so far today is that we are saved and justified and made right with God by our faith in Jesus

[Powerpoint 9-Works]

But there needs to be some evidence of our faith.

We learnt recently in Ephesians 2:8-10

That we are saved by God's grace, through our Faith

FOR Good works - that God has prepared for us in advance to do

So if we simply say - I have faith in Jesus

Where's the evidence of those good works that God has prepared for us to do?

And that's the Apostle James' point in James 2:14-26

He concludes that **faith without works is dead** (v26)

And he argues in v24

you see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

Whoa!

Is James contradicting what we've just said that we are saved by faith alone?

No he's not

James does not argue against salvation by faith alone. Rather, James argues against a salvation that is alone, a salvation that is devoid of any good works and

obedience to God's Word. James's point is that we demonstrate our faith by what we do.

Perhaps an illustration is in order

French tightrope walker, Charles Blondin on 14th Sept 1860

He walked across Niagara Falls on a tightrope, 160 feet above the Falls - several times he crossed... each time with a different daring feat - once in a sack, on stilts, on a bicycle, in the dark, and blindfolded. One time he even carried a stove and cooked an omelet in the middle.

At one point he asked the crowd before he started his next crossing: "Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?"

The crowd enthusiastically yelled: "Of course we do - you're the greatest tightrope walker in the world"

"Okay" said Charles Blondin "who wants to climb in the wheelbarrow?"

That's the Apostle James' point?

Faith is believing Blondin can walk across Niagara Falls on a tightrope with someone in the wheelbarrow

Faith accompanied by good works - is climbing in the wheelbarrow - and showing evidence of our faith!

Conclusion

[Powerpoint 10-Conclusion]

So the bottom line is we are saved by Faith in Jesus' death and resurrection -
from Galatians 2:16:

a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ

And the Apostle Paul warns in Galatians 1:9

If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let
them be under God's curse!

However we are saved FOR good works (Ephesians 2:8-9)

And works are necessary as evidence of our faith - as James points out

Challenges

So let me leave you with 2 challenges...

[Powerpoint 11a-Challenge 1]

1. Are we accepting the truth that our faith alone in Jesus has made us right with God? Or are we trying to work our way to forgiveness and eternal life? What's our MOTIVE for doing our good works? For ourselves to feel good? To get brownie points with God? So we can get a pat on the back from someone? Because we think Jesus needs our works to add to what He did on the Cross? Those are all invalid reasons! Our faith must be accompanied by

good works - because God has prepared good works for us to do - no other reason is valid.

[Powerpoint 11b-Challenge 2]

2. Is our faith real and genuine? Are we climbing in the wheelbarrow so to speak and demonstrating our faith is real and true faith - Jesus says our faith will be known and demonstrated by the fruit we bear (Matt 7:15-20) and James says faith without works is dead - so are we showing our faith - through our good works? We should want to come to church to say thank you Jesus, we should want to read our Bibles to have a better knowledge of God, His Son and His Promises, we should want to pray - praising God, confessing our sins, thanking God and petitioning God to help us and help others; we should want to share the Good News of Jesus because the Bible commands us to; we should want to love and care for others pastorally, we should want to serve our church family and community - BECAUSE Jesus says serving others is like serving Jesus Himself (Matthew 25:40-45). And that might change our attitude at work - working and doing our best to bring glory and attention to God - not ourselves

[Powerpoint 11c-Faith Alone]

We are saved by Faith Alone. Sola Fide

But not by Faith that is alone.

Let's pray...